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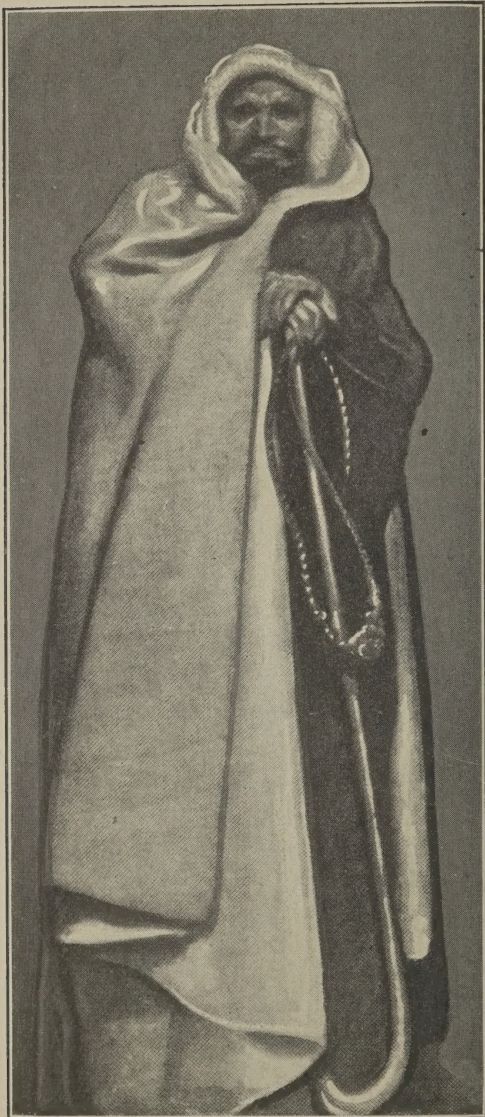












THE PROPHET AMOS

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# TOWERING FIGURES AMONG THE PROPHETS

BY

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**Towering Figures Among the Prophets**



To the young men  
in the ministry  
of  
*CHRIST'S CHURCH,*  
THE COMING PROPHETS,  
this book is  
lovingly inscribed

Prophets are not quite men,  
Writing with coaxing pen—  
He who feels the spurs of God  
Cannot pause to smile and nod.

. . . . .  
Prophets are as stars of white  
Driven, burning through the night;  
Strangers to our pale content,  
Flaming, till their lives are spent.

—A. R. MACDOUGALL, JR.



## PREFACE

Our age is rediscovering the prophets. These unique men of the eighth century, and following, before Christ never towered so majestically as they do before us of today. They rise serenely and sheer above the mist of things mundane. They were daring spirits who, allured by the trackless peaks of the Mount of God, dared to scale their steep ascents.

Much interest is being shown nowadays in the great world religions, especially in the founders of those faiths. And it is but fair to own that most of these had in them some of the elements of the prophet. But when we have traversed the realm of the great ethnic religions, we turn again to that illustrious line of Hebrew seers and acclaim them kings of the true faith. And why should not thirsty men turn from those stagnant pools to these springs whence flow fresh and life-giving waters?

This little book is an effort to make the chief prophets, those rare spirits of early Hebrew story, better known and better loved. It is written in the light of the latest Biblical knowledge. Special attention has been given to the local color and



the historical background of each, and it was intended that the particular religious experience of each man should stand out. The writer was wont to ask the following questions concerning each one of these men: What were the times in which he lived? What was it that he flung himself against? What made him act as he did? Why did he say the things he said? What was the outcome of his life? It was believed that if these questions could be measurably answered new light would be thrown upon these outstanding religious figures of the ages.

Nehemiah and Job, to be sure, are not considered prophets, but are treated here because they belong to this general period—the prophetic period of Hebrew history. Elijah, whom I have placed last in this list, chronologically belongs first.

Effort has been made to make due acknowledgment of sources and quotations at the proper places within the book. The chapters on Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Nehemiah have appeared in various religious reviews. These are revised and reprinted by permission of the publishers.

If any little windows have been opened upon these peerless men, the writer's hopes have been fully realized.

L. O. L.

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## CHAPTER I

### AMOS: THE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL OF LAW

But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.—Amos 5:24.

Robert Browning in his poem entitled "Saul" makes David utter these arresting words, "I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love, yet all's law." No one who has a worthy opinion of God and His universe can question for a moment that God is love. And no one who has deep insight into the character of God and His universe can question that God is also law, and that His universe is governed by the most inexorable of moral and physical laws. Law is everywhere as God is everywhere. Law is as much a part of things as love is a part of things. Law is as much a part of God as love is a part of God. Law is as much the method of God as love is the method of God. Love and law are the two sides of God. Justice and mercy are the two cardinal elements of His being.

Amos was a prophet of the justice of God; a preacher of the gospel of law.

God is law, says the wise; O soul, and let us rejoice,  
For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet His voice.

## I. The Man and His Times

Amos was among the earliest of the Hebrew prophets, the first, it seems, to write and preserve his message. He lived and prophesied about 750 B.C., during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. It was an era of unexcelled material prosperity for the Northern Kingdom. In a recent victory over the king of Damascus, Israel had won back the whole region east of the Jordan, which they had lost long before, much to their impoverishment. In this new expansion was Bashan, one of the most fertile and productive areas anywhere. The wealth which had been going to enrich Syria and Damascus was now turned into the coffers of Israel. A poor and insignificant people had suddenly become rich. Blessed with such unusual wealth and full of the sense of victory, they soon came to feel themselves a quite superior people. They took it as the sure sign that heaven was on their side.

And now the thing happened in Israel which almost always does happen—great material prosperity was followed by moral and spiritual poverty. Strange, but true, these so often go together—prosperity and spiritual depravity, adversity and spiritual prosperity. It ought to be just the reverse, but it seldom is. And this was never more true than in the palmy days of Amos and Jeroboam II.

A great Bible scholar has said, "Amos is one

of the most wonderful appearances in the history of the human spirit." And yet he was a simple herdsman and dresser of "sycamore" trees.

This "sycamore" tree which Amos cultivated was a kind of fig tree which produced a very low order of figs. They could not be eaten until they had been punctured so as to promote their quality and cause them to ripen. The sycamore fig was not much in demand. Only shepherds, herdsmen, and the poor ate them. They were the prophet's chief article of food, and the sale which he found for these pinched, sour figs constituted his chief means of making a living.

So Amos was a poor man, but an independent spirit; a good talker and a good thinker. He was one of the few of his day who still had a conscience and a soul: a man deeply religious and thoughtful. As he pastured his sheep and cultivated his figs out there in the solitudes, he meditated deeply upon God, and thought much about the sad religious conditions of his people. Day after day he reflected, pondered, meditated; and when a man gets to thinking, watch out for him, for soon he will be up and doing. Take note of the man who *thinks*; especially of the man who thinks about God, man, and man's relation to God. Emerson once said, "Beware when God lets loose a thinker." In Amos God had let loose a great thinker. His head was as clear as the desert air in which he had lived so

long. He thought until, like Hamlet, he felt that the times were out of joint. He had an intimate knowledge, not only of Israel, but of the nations beyond her border. He kept his inner eye on God and his finger on the moral and political pulse of the nations. Doubtless he had often visited the great central markets of the land to sell his wool, and his lambs for religious sacrifices. He had closely observed the moral conditions of these human throngs in the market places of the great cities, returning to his work on the shores of the Dead Sea to weigh and brood over them.

While thinking upon these things one day he felt the hand of God upon him, and heard Him say, "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." Amos arose to obey. He started for the Northern Kingdom and did not stop until he made his appearance on the streets of Bethel, the royal shrine of the king.

## II. The Religious Conditions

Amos arrived at Bethel on a great festal occasion. The place was thronged with people paying their compliments to religion. He found them as Paul found the Athenians—very religious. Religion was most popular and was carried on with a pomp and splendor that appealed to the superficial crowd. They styled themselves the House of Isaac, the people of the Lord. Thinking themselves the darling of Jehovah's favor,

they became proud, fickle, and self-assertive. But they were most religious withal. Never were the shrines attended by such throngs of pedantic worshipers. Never did religion seem to flourish better. They were offering sacrifices every morning instead of once a year, and tithes every three days instead of every three years, as their religious law directed. Their religious zeal was the greatest ever. But their religion was hollow. Their costly offerings were offensive to God, because brought by stained hands and godless hearts. For the prophet had investigated and found that oppression was rife. Corrupt judges, for bribes, were perverting justice, crushing the poor, and making a paradise for criminals. Many were rich, but always at the impoverishment of the masses. It was true then, as now: there cannot be idleness and luxury at one end of the social scale without poverty and suffering at the other. This is a form of cruelty of which our modern world is all too guilty. The wealthy and powerful had their winter houses and their summer houses and their palaces of ivory. They sprawled upon silk couches and ate the plump lambs from the flocks and the fat calves from the stalls. They drank their ill-gotten wine from huge, beautiful bowls and anointed themselves with costly perfumes; and, what so kindled the fierce fury of the prophet, they were doing these things, thereby causing many of God's poor to perish. The wealthy were so absorbed in sense-



less luxuries as to be utterly oblivious to the plight of the needy. They were bowing themselves down before their altars upon garments taken from the poor, which they were pledged in their religious law to return before sundown. Some were so land-greedy that Amos said they coveted the dust which clung to the poor farmer as he worked his ground. They coveted "the dust on the head of the poor"—the poor mourners who, unable to purchase the black band as a sign of mourning, took black mud and made a mark on their foreheads—Amos says they coveted even that! What a gruesome picture of their restless avarice! Moreover, many were being sold into slavery for debts amounting to no more than the price of a pair of wooden shoes, for which they could not pay. Injustice and folly so universally prevailed that the mouths of the good and the wise were silenced. And the priests—quite in keeping with priestcraft and priestly tendencies of all ages—had accommodated themselves to the times, and kept the people feeling that they were really God's people.

These people were long on profession, but short on practice; loud in creed, but low in conduct; elaborate in ceremony, but lax in ethics. There was no end of attractive forms, no lack of beautiful ritual, but a perfect famine in actual righteousness and ethical living. Had Jesus lived in Amos' time, like him He would have condemned these

insincere worshipers as beautiful white tombs, outwardly very pleasing to look at, but inwardly full of dead men's bones. In times of such spiritual lawlessness God must raise up His Amoses to proclaim the gospel of law.

### III. The Man and His Message

The prophet took his stand under the very shadow of the sanctuary and began to speak to the moving, worshiping crowd. He was a hard-looking man, clad in sheepskin, carrying a shepherd's staff. His hands were doubtless scarred from toil and stained with the biting juices of the fig. His face was lined with toil marks and the effects of long exposure.

What a sensation this rude rustic from the hills must have created! Would these fashionable people be glad to hear him preach about righteousness? Certainly not. They were interested in religion, but not in righteousness—and this Amos knew. So he did not come at once to the heart of his message. He was too shrewd for that; and, anyhow, he had an international vision. His message concerned not only Israel, but the neighboring nations as well. So he began with Syria, with whom Israel had just closed a war. "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Damascus, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof." Ah, this was Israel's hated foe. In the recent war Syria had committed brutal

crimes against them. Think how delighted they would be to hear the prophet predict their ruin! They said, "Oh, good, the prophet is right. These enemies of ours *shall be destroyed!*" They would hear him gladly *now*, and go out, I doubt not, to persuade all Bethel to come and hear a true prophet of the Lord.

Then the prophet took up the Philistines, who had made slaves of some of the Hebrews and worked them in the mines of Gaza; again they were delighted, and believed him. It is so easy to believe what pleases us. Then he prophesied against Tyre, because the people of Tyre had scrapped as a piece of paper a friendly treaty with the Jews; and again they cheered him. Then he took up Edom, then Ammon, then Moab, and finally he came to Judah, his own country which they hated cordially. "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have rejected the law of the Lord." Now they were pleased immeasurably.

These feasters of Bethel were now hanging upon his words. He had captured their attention. What skill! What a psychologist this rude sheep master is! He has now come to the theme and burden of his message. As yet he had said not a word about Israel, the Northern Kingdom; and surely he will not. But look! the preacher takes on a yet sterner aspect; his frame quivers, his

hands are raised, his eyes flash fire and suddenly, like an unexpected bolt from the blue, he thunders against Israel, "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Israel, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes." As usual it is cruelty that he denounces—this time the cruelty of peace. He said Jehovah would throw down their altars, destroy their palaces, and disrupt their kingdom. Imagine their surprise, their consternation, their anger! All is changed now; the fearless man went on, and

Read each wound, each weakness clear,  
And put his finger in the place,  
And said, "Thou ailest here and here."

He was not content until he had dragged all their sins into the light, and unsparingly denounced them—bribery, greed, oppression; luxury, idleness, injustice; intemperance, hypocrisy, immorality; and social sins, such as short measure, the sale of adulterated food, and violence. This was an unexpected turn of the preacher; his hammer-like refrain, "For three transgressions, yea, for four," fell upon them with terrific force. He had smitten them with words. He had uttered the sickening truth, stating the logical reason: *Because they sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes.* )

In the face of all this injustice and wrong, the

prophet with his whole soul speaking, bade them "let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." None ever had a greater passion for social justice and moral straightness than Amos. He wanted to see truth and right flow through the land like a never-failing stream, cleansing, purifying, and making healthy every phase of human life.

Amos had found the women of Samaria deeply degraded; they were haughty, intemperate, immodest, and immoral. Speaking to the great ladies of the capital, "with almost brutal candor," he calls them cattle. They are prize cows, fat and pampered, who gratify their fads and fancies at the expense of the squalid poor. He said, "Hear this word, ye cows of Bashan, that are in Samaria, which oppress the poor, crush the needy . . . and drink"—and went on promising punishment for them. This was not only burning sarcasm but deep pathos. To Amos the degradation of Israel's women was pathetic beyond words. He knew what we know: that the morals of any country cannot be higher than the morals of its women. The quality of any civilization is largely what its women make it. And when the prophet saw the womanhood of Israel in foul decay, he foresaw the nation's doom. A pure and womanly womanhood is any nation's greatest treasure; an unwomanly womanhood is its gravest peril. The women of Samaria were given to luxury and drink,



and unchastity, social abuse, and irreligion followed. These go hand in hand today. Drink, inhumanity, irreligion, and the degradation of women always go together.

For these social and religious evils Amos declared that Israel would be punished. He said Jehovah hated their sacrifices; that He regarded their Temple songs as nothing but hideous noise. He said their very worship was a sin. God was saying, "Away with churchgoing, and sacraments; seek not Bethel, seek Me." God was not in their churches. Bethel and Gilgal shall taste the gall of bitter exile. God will destroy them, says Amos.

Now Gilgal, Beer-sheba, and Bethel were hoary with memories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Will God forget these great ones and fall in judgment upon the sanctuaries thrice hallowed by their memories? Surely the prophet is mad! It was at this same Bethel that Jacob saw the golden incline reaching to heaven, on which there passed downward and upward the angels of God; it was here that heaven and earth and God and man had early met each other. Was Bethel to be destroyed? Does the foolish prophet suppose that this *house of God, this gate of heaven*, is to be spoiled by God, to whose glory it has stood through the years? It seemed to them the height of improbability. It was absurd to say that God was so displeased with them as this innovator said. Their present prosperity gave his words the lie.

They could not believe him, and they would no longer endure his smiting words.

Then the head priest of Bethel called Amos a visionary, and told him to go back to Judah and play the prophet there, where they would gladly hear his scathing words against Israel. The priest had nothing but contempt for the prophet. He used the most contemptuous name for a prophet then known—a name born of sneering derision—he called him a “seer.” It was hard for Amaziah, being a priest, to do justice to Amos, the prophet. He misrepresented him, said he had formed a party in conspiracy against the land. This Amos had not done, but had stood alone with God against Israel. The prophet had spoken against the shrines and the ruling house, but the priest gave his words a priestly twist and accused him of treason and impiety. He said he had spoken against God and the king. In the same way the priests of a later day said that Jesus had spoken against Caesar. We can never forget that our Lord was killed on false charges which had been given a priestly twist to make them seem true. This was one of those priestly suppressions of the truth of which the world knows too much. Jeroboam seems to have guessed this and took no notice of the charges. The priest did not wait for the king to expel the prophet, but himself ordered him to leave Bethel. This was a government function usurped

by a priest—another familiar thing in priestcraft. This is an old thing and an ever new thing in the world.

Here is a parable of the ages. The priest and the prophet are in perpetual conflict. The one stands for spirit in religion; the other for form. The priest says ritual is the big thing in worship; the prophet says it has little to do with true worship, which is adoration of God from the heart. The priest, jealous for his position, willingly shields the vices of the people; the prophet, jealous only for God and right, exposes every sin. The prophet is the exponent of reform, and deplores the evils of his country; the priest is the opponent of reform, and pleads his country's good. The one is the servant of the government; the other the servant of God. The one is the champion of the privileged; the other the defender of the unprivileged. The one is the spokesman for legalism and bondage; the other is a voice for spiritual liberty. The one stands for tradition and stagnation; the other for truth and progress. The one pleads for a new and better order; the other defends the established order. Here is a picture of an age-long, world-old, eternal conflict between religion of the spirit and that of the letter. The world has had too much of the priest and too little of the prophet; too much of Amaziah and too little of Amos. It was so with Israel *then*: it is so with us *now*.

As has been said, the history of religion might be written in terms of the age-long struggle between priest and prophet. As we take the long look backward, our attention is fixed upon the achievements of the prophets who saw visions and dreamed dreams, who by their idealism caused old, effete ages to pass and new and better eras to come in.

That which constitutes any man a prophet—whether preacher or layman, whether in the Church or out of it—is the ability to see, and make men see, the City of God and to persuade them to fashion their lives and rebuild their human institutions after its pattern, no matter what the cost may be. The prophet is a revolutionary, an uprooter, a demolisher of things established, ever calling for a better order of things; the priest is the defender of old and existing institutions. The prophet is rarely popular with his contemporaries, and never with those who have any great stake in the existing order of things. Men treat him as the most dangerous foe, and often ruthlessly dispose of him. But

He dares confront the time,  
And speak the truth and give the world no rest.  
No kingly threat can cowardize his breath;  
He with majestic step goes forth to meet his death.

But after he is gone men see not the impossible dreams he had, but the solid progress that has been made in consequence of them. Then they

erect monuments to his honor and sing hymns to his praise. Then they realize what they would have missed, had he not come. The priest, on the other hand, is popular with his contemporaries, but future generations remember him, if at all, only to curse him for his opposition to truth and his persecution of the prophet. The priest sees the good of today—or more often that of the past—as quite good enough, and sets himself to conserve it; the prophet visions a brighter, juster tomorrow, and gives himself wholly to its realization.

So it was with Amos, the prophet of Tekoa, and with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel.

Amos assured the priest that he was no professional prophet; that he did not belong to the school of the prophets. He had no official commission; was not a man of the schools, but was convinced that God had called him to preach: and preach he would. Such a man with such a conviction is always a disturber of the *status quo*. Amos preached the gospel of law to a people ignoring God's laws and man's rights. He preached a long time ago, nearly twenty-seven hundred years, but how modern he seems. How the Church—America—the world—needs Amoses today!

Increase thy prophets, Lord! Give strength to smite  
Shame to the heart of luxury and sloth!  
Give them the yearning after human souls  
That burned in Wesley's breast! Through them, great  
God!



Teach poverty it may be rich in thee;  
Teach riches the true wealth of thine own spirit.  
To our loved land, Celestial Purity!  
Bring back the meaning of those Ancient words,  
Not lost but soiled, and darkly disesteemed,  
The ever-sacred name of husband, wife,  
And the great name of love—whereon is built  
The temple of human happiness and hope!  
Baptize with holy wrath thy prophets, Lord!  
By them purge from us this corruption foul  
That seizes on our civic governments,  
Crowns the corrupter in the sight of men,  
And makes him maker of laws and honor's source!  
Let kindle as before, O Heavenly Light!  
New messengers of righteousness and hope,  
And courage, for our day! So shall the world  
That ever surely climbs to thy desire  
Grow swifter toward thy purpose and intent.

## CHAPTER II

### HOSEA: THE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL OF LOVE

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.—  
Hosea 14:4.

#### I. The Man

The mantle of the prophet Amos fell upon the shoulders of Hosea. The stern, relentless preacher of the gospel of law was followed by the tender-hearted preacher of the gospel of love. The rugged message of Amos was not only succeeded by the beautiful message of Hosea, but it was superseded and surpassed by it.

Someone has called Amos the James of the Old Testament, and Hosea the John. The comparison is not amiss. Amos was concerned with the ethical and the moral in religion. He was a vehement lover of justice and truth, and a tremendous hater of injustice and sham. But Hosea was concerned with the spirit in religion, and gave forth a message of love and grace. One might say that Hosea dealt with the roots of religion, while Amos dealt with its fruits. Hosea went to its source in the heart, while Amos treated its surface outworkings in everyday life. Hosea had looked deep into the unfath-

omable depths of the loving heart of God, while Amos had caught only the vision of His supreme holiness and justice. In the words of another, "Amos was the inflexible preacher of righteousness and judgment to come; Hosea was the tender-hearted preacher of outraged love." The one was the prophet of God's wrath against sin; the other the preacher of His loving-kindness toward all men. Amos was a preacher of Divine law; Hosea was a preacher of Divine love. Amos was more intellect than heart; Hosea was more heart and soul than intellect. Amos appealed to the reason; Hosea appealed to the affections. The message of Amos was one of justice and righteousness; while that of Hosea was one of grace, mercy, forgiveness, love.

It requires both Amos with his wrath against sin, and Hosea with his moving, melting love for the sinning, to set forth the full truth of God. In these two prophets Judgment and Mercy have kissed each other. But it is fitting that the wounding Amos should be swiftly followed by the healing Hosea. Hosea was the choicer spirit, and his was the grander message:

For all can feel the God that smites,  
But, ah, how few the God that loves!

Amos was a citizen of the Southern Kingdom and lived in the village of Tekoa; Hosea belonged to the Northern Kingdom and sprang, it seems, from the country. Amos had left his home in

Judah to deliver a single message of warning and woe to the light-hearted people of the North; but Hosea spent a lifelong ministry preaching to his own distressed and sinning people, Israel. If Amos was sometimes lonely in the wilds of the wilderness; Hosea was the loneliest man of his age, though he spent the whole of his life in the throng.

## II. His Times

Remember that the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II had just closed, and with it the best and palmiest days the Northern Kingdom ever saw. It was an era in which outward prosperity had gone beyond all previous bounds and broken all former records, but luxury, injustice, vice, and irreligion had flourished also. Amos had foreseen and predicted the fate of the nation, and his predictions were now fast coming true in Hosea's day. The social evils which he had so sternly denounced had increased; society had become more and more rotten. And, feeling themselves the darling people of God, the Israelites had gone on heedless of the prophet's plea for repentance and reform. Their sad state had grown steadily worse; so far down the slippery slope to ruin had they gone that neither the passionate warnings of Amos nor the plaintive, pathetic appeals of Hosea could avert their destruction.

A period of disorder was now upon them. One

man after another had usurped the throne of Israel, after murdering his predecessor, until nine kings had been dethroned and murdered by their successors. In two hundred fifty years Israel had eighteen kings from ten different dynasties, every one of which came to an end in violence and death. These were the darkest days that Israel had so far experienced, but the blackest hour of their history was just a little in the future. It was too plain to Hosea that the end of the Jewish state was near. He saw his beloved country dancing on the edge of doom, and knew that his countrymen were sporting with disaster. And indeed very soon after he quit preaching, Sargon, king of Assyria, carried the Ten Northern Tribes into exile from which they never returned.

Such was the stormy period in which Hosea lived. He was compelled to witness the suicide of the nation he so much loved. Their hollow religion had answered very well while the golden days of Jeroboam lasted, but when adversity came, it utterly broke down, as nothing but genuine religion could withstand so fierce a test.

This deplorable condition of his people, together with the sad misfortune which developed in his own home, broke the young prophet's heart. He was the saddest man in all the land. Perhaps this accounts for the strange and touching expressions all through his sermons—cries, now of denunciation, now of anger, now of agony and tears,



now of loving entreaty. His book has rightly been called "a book of sobs." It is full of short, sometimes unfinished and sometimes unintelligible sentences. And his messages are full, now of scorn, now of tenderest pleading, now of hot condemnation, now of plaintive despair and grief, now of faith, pity, love, hope, and the promise of forgiveness.

Robertson Smith says, "The doom which he proclaims to his people is the doom of all that is dearest to him on earth; his heart is ready to break with sorrow, his very reason totters under the awful vision of judgment; his whole prophecy is a cry of anguish as again and again he renews his appeal to the heedless nation that is running headlong to destruction." His messages have been briefly summed up in three words: complaint, condemnation, and consolation.

### III. His Home Life

Heartbroken and wounded over the sins and sorrows of his nation, and spurned and rejected by his people, who thought him to be mad, he sought comfort and consolation elsewhere.

It was now that he dreamed of a happy home with the woman he could love and trust, and who in return, would love and comfort him. Never did a young man more keenly feel the need of the sympathy and companionship of woman than did this young poet-preacher of Israel.

Then it was that he met a young woman whose name was Gomer. From the very first he admired her greatly. Erelong he was deeply in love with her. Soon they were married, and the halcyon days of a poet-preacher's love began. They were young, untarnished, and happy.

The prophet thought that there was every promise of a delightful married life. He would now have a companion, one who would share his difficult career. Hosea was all built up. He looked into the troubled future with a glad, strong heart. The morning of joy and nuptial bliss seemed now to be dawning.

One day this young wife presented the young prophet with their first baby, a fine little boy, to whom Hosea gave a name symbolical of the evil times. He called him Jezreel, which meant "vengeance." Now Jezreel was the bloody battle field out on the plains of Esdraelon where the Jews had been so many times "thrashed" by the armies of the nations. This little boy was to be a living prophecy of what was coming upon Israel. But Hosea was a happy man. The baby might portend evil for Israel, but surely not for Hosea and Gomer.

Now it is an old saying that every man finds his heaven or his hell in the woman he marries. As for Hosea, it looks as if he has found his heaven in the charming young Gomer of Samaria. But, alas! I must hasten to say that the prophet

was sadly disappointed. A terrible thing took place. Gomer turned out to be an unfaithful wife. She fell a victim to the impurity and wickedness of the times. She was ensnared by the wild orgies of Baal, and deserted her husband and her home. He came home one day to find that she had gone off with other lovers, and Hosea's dream of a happy home was shattered. I need not tell you that this completely broke the prophet's heart—of course it would.

Before long Gomer had fallen so low, had become so degraded, that she was sold into sensual slavery. But, strange to say, in this her lowest degradation, her husband did not abandon her. He hated her glaring wrong, but he loved Gomer still. I think I can see this wet-eyed, tender-natured lover and hear him groan in the bitterness of his soul, "O Gomer, how shall I give thee up?" But I have no doubt the people said that Hosea was a fool for showing any concern whatever for so unworthy a wife; but I see him as he goes, amid the jeers of the people, down into the slave market where his wife is exposed for sale, to redeem her. Down the street and into the haunts of sin and shame he comes. There in a place surrounded by vile men who traffic in human souls is the prophet's bride of other years. Her eyes, once homes of beauty and winsomeness, are bleary; her face is parchment-like, her features pinched. She cringes and crouches at the sight of her frantic lover and hus-

band. For a moment he is tempted to despise her. Then the surly slaver calls for bids upon her. Hosea can stand it no longer. The compassion of his old love sweeps over him. His pity burns a purifying, consuming flame. He has forgotten her sin, he has forgiven her shame. He sees her not the degraded thing that she is, but the lovely bride of happier days. Up to the block he goes. He puts down the price demanded, fifteen pieces of silver and an homer and a half of barley, which is the price of a slave. He takes her back home, and tenderly seeks to restore her to virtue, and to regain her love and affection.

Weeping blinding tears  
I took her to myself, and paid the price  
(Strange contrast to the dowry of her youth  
When first I wooed her); and she came again  
To dwell beneath my roof.

By and by a second child comes into the home, this time a daughter. The prophet called it Loruhamah, which means "unpitied" or "uncompassionated," for it was an illegitimate child. The name pointed to the nation's broken relation to God.

Then the third child was born, another son, whom Hosea called Lo-ammi, which means "no kin of mine" or "not my people," for it was another unfortunate child, the child of Gomer's sin. By each of these names the prophet seeks to personify some evil in the nation's life. The

first stood for judgment to come; the second indicated the broken relation between God and His people; the third signified Israel's complete estrangement from God and final disownment by Him.

#### IV. His Message

The prophet brooded deeply over his broken nation and his broken home; but out of these bitter trials God began to speak to him in a new way. As he contemplated his ruined home, there was given to him a new revelation: he saw that his own tragic experience with Gomer was a picture of the experience that God was then having with Israel. God had been a husband to Israel, but she had played the harlot with the Baals.

In the early days God had entered into a marriage covenant with Israel, but Israel has not kept her plighted troth, she has broken that marriage bond; she bows to the Tyrian Baals. Hosea says the whole land has committed "whoredom, departing from the Lord."

It was back at the Exodus from Egypt that God had "found Israel as grapes in the wilderness," and had claimed her as His own "chosen people." He had cherished her; had made her the object of His special love and blessing. Jehovah and Israel had given each other their plighted troth, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," said the Covenant. But like Gomer,



Israel has left her first-sworn Lover for profligate lovers—the filthy heathen deities. What was once her virgin purity is gone. She has so far lost her moral integrity that Hosea is compelled to admit, “There is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land.” Israel, like Gomer, has played the harlot and all purity and decency and integrity are gone. The sacred marriage vow is broken; love is outraged; Israel is joined to Baal, the foulest and filthiest of the heathen gods, instead of Jehovah.

The state of the prophet’s unhappy people had become as bad as bad could be. It had been difficult much of the time to tell whose wife Gomer was; she was first with Hosea, then with some other man. So it was with Israel. She had so mixed the worship of Baal with the worship of Jehovah that it was difficult to say which she was the most devoted to. This is perhaps equally true of many Church members today. Judging from the conduct of many of us, it is not easy to tell whether we are more devoted to God or some one of the many enticing modern Baals.

Speaking on behalf of God, the prophet cries, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself,” and goes on to lament and deplore her shameful unfaithfulness, and to speak once more of the penalty it shall have. But scarcely does he get the withering word out of his mouth when he quickly adds, “But in me is thy help.” Their sin is grievous

and provoking beyond measure, but God will yet show mercy none the less. Such is His overmastering love for His people.

Hosea had come to see that his own pity for Gomer was but a faint similitude of the yearning love of God for His erring people. Great sorrow had made his heart gentler; bitter tears had made his spiritual eyesight clearer.

Can it be, O Christ in heaven,  
That the holiest suffer most,  
That the strongest wander farthest,  
And more hopelessly are lost?  
That the mark of rank in nature  
Is capacity for pain,  
That the anguish of the singer  
Makes the sweetness of the strain?

It was said of F. W. Robertson, that "pain had made him creative," and that "it was when his heart's blood was being drawn that the heart of his genius was revealed." How true it was with Hosea! He reached his highest through sorrow. His tears had cleansed and clarified his vision. He now saw things which formerly he did not see. He saw that Gomer's fall was but a part of the widespread pollution of the times, and that her treatment of him was but an adumbration of Israel's treatment of Jehovah. Gomer had forsaken her husband; Israel had forsaken her God.

But from the black tragedy of his home life, Hosea had discovered the secret of God's uncon-

querable love for faithless Israel. God is deeply wronged; He is a Husband terribly sinned against, who deeply resents such wanton unfaithfulness, yet offers to forgive and be reconciled, if Israel will amend her ways. Though God will punish Israel's disloyalty, yet He will again woo her, as at the first, when in the wilderness He found her young and innocent. He will make a New Marriage Covenant with her. Though Israel, like Gomer, is unworthy of such favor, yet, like her, she shall be restored. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."

From the beginning God had been to Israel "a jealous God"; to her He had given the sublimest revelation of truth; to her He had sent the high-visioned prophets to instruct, warn, and guide her; upon her as upon no other He had lavished His conjugal love. But Israel had trampled upon that love; she had wounded the heart of her Lover; had brought upon Him humiliation and chagrin. For this she must be punished. The Exile is coming—but beyond the Exile Hosea hastens to promise mercy and restoration.

So God's love outweighs His wrath. He cannot bear the thought of a permanent separation. He cries, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my compassions

are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man." These words remind us of a Greater than Hosea. Hosea is surely the first evangelist of the Old Testament, if not of the world, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." His threats melt into the tenderest promises. He says as Browning would say:

So the All-Great were the All-Loving too—  
So through the thunder comes a human voice  
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!"

The prophet assures Israel that the just anger of Jehovah is turned away; the people shall yet be saved, they shall yet "blossom as the lily." Out of the chastisement will come regeneration. Their anguish and sorrow is to be turned into purity and peace. Even in the dark Exile, that Valley of Trouble, there is to be a Door of Hope; for God will yet redeem them from the land of hell. The ominous names of the prophet's children shall be reversed. Jezreel shall no longer mean "God scatters" or "vengeance," it shall no longer speak of blood and battle and death and defeat, for in love and mercy God will "sow" Israel unto Himself, and she shall multiply and be fruitful to His glory. Lo-ruhamah shall no longer mean "unpitied"; it shall be changed to "pitied" or "loved." Lo-ammi, meaning "not my people," "no kin of mine," will become Ammi,

“my people,” for in that day God will say to them which were not His people, “Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.” Beautiful, beautiful! “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.” The love of God which passeth knowledge and the pity which redeems and restores was first discovered and revealed by Hosea.

### V. Lessons He Taught Us

Hosea teaches us many useful lessons, all of which he learned himself from his dreadful experiences.

1. In the first place he teaches us that we must know God if we are to be saved from the sins which will work our undoing. The trouble with Israel was, “There was no knowledge of God in the land.” God was not in their thought, therefore not in their deeds. There was plenty of attractive ritual and much “sacrificing,” but no mercy or justice or love. God must be enthroned in our thinking if He is to be in our living.

2. Hosea learned for himself, and teaches us, the dark nature of sin. Sin had ruined his home and his nation. When he married Gomer, she was a virtuous woman, but he had felt her regard for him growing less and less; he had seen her love of the filthy grow stronger and stronger until she had become the slave of sin. And God’s experience with Israel was the same as the prophet’s



with Gomer. In both cases sin was the cause of the estrangement and defilement.

3. But the greatest lesson Hosea learned from these national and domestic troubles was the amazing love and persistent mercy of God. He was the first to make the grand discovery that *God is love*. He found that in spite of the sins of Gomer, which had blighted his home and broken his heart, he could love her still. And if he could love the unworthy Gomer still—and he knew he did—he saw how God could yet love Israel—and *that he did still love her*. This was the love that will not let us go. With Browning in Paracelsus, Hosea could have said:

“God! Thou art Love! I build my faith on that!”

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.” This sounds for all the world like the Son of Man, who stood in the Temple on that last great day of the feast, and out of His soul of compassion cried, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” This is the gospel which Paul preached—the gospel of love, of forgiveness, and of grace.

In all the ancient world there is no story of human love like that of Hosea. It may seem like madness for this pure and good man so to

regard his wayward wife as to go to the slave market and buy her and give her another chance; for remember that in the East the husband was lord of the wife; the power of divorce was altogether in his hand. But Hosea refused to divorce Gomer, because of his passionate love for her, though she had wronged him unspeakably.

Now Hosea lived twenty-six centuries ago, and we who live now have a far more wonderful tale of love to tell; we can tell of Christ on Calvary, dying to set us free from the slavery of sin. When you and I had resisted His mercy and insulted His love; when in cool contempt we had turned everyone to our own sinful way, He did not leave us to ourselves, but in great sympathy came to the slave market and bought us. And the price which He paid for us was not fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley, but His lifeblood on a Roman cross! "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

Hosea knew what we know—that nothing but God can satisfy the human soul. He knew when Israel had gotten her sickening fill of sin, that she would turn again to God who all the while was seeking her. Francis Thompson in his beautiful poem, "The Hound of Heaven," fancies the Spirit of God pursuing the soul of man until He has overtaken it. It is the never-ending pur-

suing of Divine Love, and correctly portrays the heart of the great Father going after His erring children which flee from Him. It makes a fitting summary to Hosea's book and Hosea's life and Hosea's version of the love of God.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up vistaed hopes I sped;  
And shot, precipitated  
Adown Titanic glooms and chasmed fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat—and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet—  
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

### CHAPTER III

## MICAH: THE PROPHET WHO PITIED THE POOR

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—Micah 6:8. R. V.

Without doubt this is one of the choicest bits of Old Testament preaching. It is one of the rarest gems in the world's literature of spiritual religion. It is a fine summary of the great moral and ethical principles of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, and sounds for all the world like a paragraph from the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. It is not only a good summary of the loftiest teaching of the prophets of Israel, but it is on the same exalted plane as the ethical teachings of Jesus. Indeed it could be written into our Lord's ethical code, the Sermon on the Mount, without striking any as being at all out of place.

Micah was "the prophet of the poor." He was the one prophet above all others who pitied the poor. He was the poor man's friend. Other prophets like Amos just before him, and Hosea and Isaiah of his own day, had nobly pleaded for the rights of the poor, but no prophet of

Israel made their cause so completely his own as did Micah. Micah would have liked Luke's putting of our Lord's beatitude, "Blessed are ye *poor*: for yours is the kingdom of God."

Micah was preaching in Samaria and the border sections of Judah when Isaiah was preaching in Jerusalem. Micah had sprung from the poorest of the poor, he spoke mostly to the poor, and always on behalf of them; but Isaiah had come from a well-known family, and spoke mainly to the leaders of the people. Micah was at home in the huts of the common folk; Isaiah was at home in king's courts. Micah lived his life among the lowly; Isaiah moved in the circles of the mighty. Micah was a peasant and a man of the people; Isaiah was an aristocrat, a statesman, and counselor of kings. So humble was the family of Micah that his father's name nowhere appears in the Bible. This would not have been the case, according to ancient eastern custom, had he been of any note. Micah is not even referred to as a prophet—he is just plain "Micah the Morasthite"; but Isaiah is the celebrated prophet of Judah, the prominent and very conspicuous son of Amoz.

Moreover, Micah was no city man, but was a man of the countryside, with not much love for big corrupt cities. The cities of his day were crowded with sleek extortioners and decorated dandies who fattened from the unremitting toils of the peasant tillers of the soil. To him the



cities were full of proud human riffraff whose chief business it was to suck in the blood of the common people. He was a down-state man who had the same prejudice against Samaria and Jerusalem that many people now feel toward New York and Chicago. On the other hand, Isaiah was a city man who admired and loved Jerusalem passionately. Micah was hopelessly rural-minded with eyes wide open to the hollowness of urban life and manners; Isaiah was urban-minded, a metropolitan through and through. He loved the pageantry of broad streets, rushing throngs, politics, and business.

"Micah was convinced that Jerusalem would be overthrown, and finally she was; Isaiah was sure that she would be delivered, as she was for a time." Micah was the friend of agriculture; he gloried in the country, and believed it to be the hope of the people, rather than the cities. The greatest men he knew had arisen from among the poor and lowly commoners of the country districts. Within a few miles of Micah's peasant home, Amos and Elijah, Israel's first great prophets—both of them men of faith and fire—had arisen to voice mightily the mind of God and the sentiments of the poor. Then, too, just over the hills from Moresheth-gath, David had defeated Goliath and had risen from the ranks of the shepherd serfs to become Israel's model king and the foremost defender of the poor.

The spirit of these men was burning in Micah's soul; he was "full of power by the spirit of the Lord, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." In espousing the cause of the poor, Micah went about exposing the pity which was in the heart of God toward his helpless farmer-folk caught in the talons of their preying landlords of the city.

Micah bore a fierce message against the rulers of the people—priests, princes, and hireling prophets. The brunt of his message was leveled against Samaria and Jerusalem, the capitals of Israel and Judah. He was especially severe on Jerusalem. He declared that her priests were commercial time-servers, and that her prophets were cowards regulating their message, according to their income. He said their doings were dictated by gain, not God. They were false shepherds, hireling prophets. "They lived upon the alms of the rich, and flattered according as they were fed." Her judges render decisions for a bribe, her priests give oracles for a reward, and her prophets divine for silver. "They build up Zion with blood," he says, "and Jerusalem with iniquity." Their great buildings are cemented with the blood of the people, and the Temple is supported by oppression of the poor; and, because of the sins of the leaders, he declares, "The godly man is perished out of the earth." Avarice and injustice fill the land. The leaders are acting

out the vicious principle that might makes right. "They covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage."

Our prophet preaches as if he himself had been a victim of the greedy land grabber. Perhaps his own family had been reduced to poverty, as many another of Micah's people had been, by the great nobles of Samaria or Jerusalem. The masses, long oppressed and robbed, had become vicious. Public opinion had fallen so low that evil had no need to resort to its usual plan of operating in the dark; it everywhere flourished uncondemned in the light. A vicious government and a vicious religion had vitiated and blasted the morals of the people; but as Goldsmith has truly said:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.

This was the unhappy state of things in Judah. And Micah said that Jerusalem, because of her sins, should be plowed as a field; that the Temple mound should become a heap and a forest. About one hundred years later this prophecy saved Jeremiah's life. When the Chaldeans were besieging the city, Jeremiah preached in the Temple saying that Jerusalem and the Temple should be speedily destroyed. He was arrested as a traitor and was being rushed out of the place to be killed, when someone who knew his Bible, quoted what Micah had said, "Micah the Morasthite prophesied in

the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps." The man went on to say that Hezekiah did not put Micah to death because of his unpleasant prediction, but that Jerusalem repented and was spared. Jerusalem did not reform this time, but the Biblical precedent quoted at the right time saved Jeremiah's life.

About the time that Micah began preaching, Sargon, King of Assyria, came up and destroyed Samaria. It seems that it was this calamity that awoke the prophet. When the great army of Assyria went rumbling through north Israel, Micah broke silence. And it was only a few more years until Sennacherib's army was pounding at the walls of Jerusalem.

Micah said the people were bringing this judgment upon themselves by their sins; and that they were not repenting of them. On the contrary, they were relying on increased devotion to formal religion to save them. He said that they had substituted ritual for righteousness, and ceremonial for vital religion. He saw this to be both insidious and ruinous. He reminded them of "the error of Balaam," and scorned their complacent trust in empty religious rites in which there was no heart contrition. "Wherefore shall I come before the Lord, and bow down myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?" Then he put to them a

burning question full of sarcasm and contempt of their religiousness, "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil?"

In the thriving days of north Israel Amos had also warned against their empty and pretentious ceremoniousness. He said that God hated their feast days and their solemn assemblies. The music of their sacred instruments was but a hideous clatter, and their Temple songs but noise in His ears. He called upon them to cease their ostentatious promenades, to stop their showy, extravagant sacrificing and do works of righteousness. He said, "Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." What does God care for the smoke of costly sacrifices, said Amos, though offered upon altars of gold, when the wails of the poor are filling His ears? They had sold the poor peasant for silver, and the needy for the price of a pair of shoes.

Isaiah had also brought like charges against Judah during the Sennacherib crisis. When that Assyrian plunderer was stalking through the land leaving ruin everywhere, the people suddenly became very religious. They increased the number of their sacrifices and the solemnity of their ritual services, in the hope of buying off God's displeasure. But their heart-life was still unchanged toward God, and Isaiah said, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith



the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks. . . . Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me, . . . your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; . . . I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." He asserted that Israel had been unreasonable with God. Their much churchgoing was only "temple treading," there was no intelligent worship in it. They were acting "as if there were a fool on the throne of the universe."

Ritualism and sensualism looked about alike to these prophets: they usually go together. They besought their people to be reasonable with God, to put reason in religion. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." Their long subservience to blind formalism had cut off reason in worship. We only mock religious worship when we do not put intelligence and heart into it. Amos and Isaiah and Micah strove to show their people that true religion was heart purity and right living. They affirmed that the cure of Zion's ills was spiritual and practical religion:

“What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?” There was nothing of the priest in Micah. He was no ritualist substituting colorful and pleasing rites for correct living.

God does not want any of us coming to Him offering *things*, but *ourselves*. Says Micah, God does not want fat calves and shining dollars half so much as consecrated worship and right living. He wants justice, kindness, thankfulness, and the humble walk.

It has been pointed out that Amos pleaded with Israel to *do justly*, that Hosea pleaded with her to *love mercy*, that Isaiah pleaded with her to *walk humbly with God*, and that Micah welded all three of these into a compact definition of Old Testament religion. Micah said that religion, to be anything, must be practical and spiritual and personal.

In Micah the Old Testament reaches a sublime peak. It had been a long, weary climb from the capricious, bargain-driving, tribal war god of the first Hebrews to the just and ethical God of Amos, the holy and righteous God of Isaiah, the seeking, merciful God of Hosea, the justice-loving, gracious God of Micah, to the universal and world-embracing God of Jeremiah and the Book of Jonah. It was a far cry from Jacob's God to the God of Jesus Christ, but from the God of Jeremiah, Jonah, and Micah it was but a single short-step.

Micah's classic definition of true religion falls naturally into three parts: (1) "To do justice." The world is in very many ways quite unjust, yet God is just, and will at last render perfect justice to all.

For right is right, since God is God;  
And right the day must win;  
To doubt would be disloyalty,  
To falter would be sin.

One day the strong will oppress the weak, and the noble abuse the peasant no more. Men should be just and kind because God is just and kind, and to be godly in this world, a man must first *do justly* toward all men.

But this is not all, (2) he must "love kindness." The man who loves kindness and is merciful is a good man. It is not the hardest thing to love justice, to want justice of a kind inexorably executed, but it is not easy to *love mercy*: that is altogether a divine thing to do, and the one who does it is godlike.

But there is yet another thing which God requires of the upright person, and that is (3) "to walk humbly." Humility is the crowning virtue of noble character, the brightest ornament of Christian living. The old adage is right: There is no true holiness without humility; it is the foundation of all virtue. Humility means meekness, and meekness is a mark of the great. Moses, we are told, was one of the meekest of men, and

he was one of the greatest and best. Christ was the meekest man who ever lived, and the best.

Now we see how these interlock making three links in a golden chain. A man can do justly only as he loves mercy, and he can love mercy only as he walks humbly with God. Micah saw the beauty of

Humility, that low, sweet root  
From which all heavenly virtues shoot.

He could have sung with Bunyan his Song of Low Degree:

He that is down needs fear no fall;  
He that is low, no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.

In studying this peasant prophet, one is struck with the aptness and clarity of his vision, with the way his prophecies have come true.

He was sure that Jerusalem would be destroyed, while Isaiah was convinced that it would not be. In this the two prophets seem to be in direct conflict, but both were right. Jerusalem was not destroyed in Isaiah's time. Sennacherib did not capture Jerusalem: she repented and was spared; but one hundred fifty years after his army was destroyed (which thing saved Jerusalem) the prophecy of Micah was fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar made Jerusalem a heap of ruins and the Temple a smoking pile as this prophet had said.

Edwin Markham's lines about Greece and Rome would have applied equally well to Samaria and Jerusalem of Micah's day.

Eternity was on the pyramid,  
And immortality on Greece and Rome;  
But in them all the ancient traitor hid,  
And so they tottered like unstable foam.

No house can stand, no kingdom can endure,  
Built on the crumbling rock of self-desire:  
Nothing is living stone, nothing is sure,  
That is not whitened in the social fire.<sup>1</sup>

How well Micah seems to have known the truth enshrined in these lines.

But what is more, this prophet in these disturbed days of Israel's history predicted the coming of a Deliverer, the coming of a King from God. And not only did he predict the coming of a Great Deliverer, but dared to specify the place where he would be born. He said he would not be a city-born prince, but would rise from among the peasants of the country. The Messiah would not spring from Jerusalem, but from Bethlehem. He would be a second David born in David's village, and of David's dynasty. He would come of the unspoiled and undefiled shepherd people of Judah. Among these He would be born and share their toils and know their wrongs. He would be a Man of the people.

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<sup>1</sup> Used by special permission of the author.



“And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall come forth One unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

Micah was right; for, seven hundred years later when wise men enquired in Jerusalem where Christ should be born, Jewish rabbis referred them to his prophecy, and they went to Bethlehem in Judah and found the prophet's words to be true. They

. . . came to the manger,  
And gazed on the Holy Child;  
And calmly o'er the rude cradle  
The virgin mother smiled;  
And the sky in the starlit silence,  
Seemed full of the angel lay:  
“To you in the city of David  
A Saviour is born today.”

The “strong Son of God” came as this modest countryman said He would. In the words of George Adam Smith, “His lowly origin was a fact. He sprang from the most democratic of the peoples. His ancestor was a shepherd, and His mother a peasant girl. He Himself was a carpenter: at home, as His parables show, in the fields and the folds and the barns of His country.”<sup>1</sup> Micah had divined the humanness of the Messiah better than any other of the prophets. Once

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<sup>1</sup> *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. I, p. 415, George H. Doran Co., New York. Used by permission.

more God had taken a weak thing of the earth to confound the mighty, and a base to baffle the wise. It is often His way.

Moreover, Micah makes us think of Christ. Both sprang from the rustic lowly; both knew the sting of poverty, the fatigue of toil, and rejection at the hands of men. Neither were much appreciated until "after many days," but the ages have brought them both into a prophet's heritage. And to the end of things mundane both shall be revered by grateful mankind. From little Bethlehem did come forth the Ruler, and now He is great to the ends of the earth. Like this prophet who so pitied the poor, Jesus was an ardent champion of God's poor, and ever made their cheerless lot His very own. He gave it out as one of the surest evidences that He was that promised Deliverer, the Messiah of the prophets, the fact that "the poor had the gospel preached to them." No wonder "the common people heard him gladly"!

## CHAPTER IV<sup>d</sup>

### ISAIAH: THE PROPHET OF THE FAR VISION

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.—Isaiah 6:1.

#### I. His Times

Isaiah of Jerusalem was in most ways the greatest prophet which the Hebrews, that prophet-producing people, ever had. He preached in a critical period of history. It was the evening time of the Assyrian empire. Egypt likewise was fast approaching dissolution. But for Babylon it was morning again. These empires—Egypt to the south, Assyria to the north, and Babylon to the east—all eyed each other across the little state of Palestine. And when their armies clashed, as often they did, it was not infrequently upon her soil. The land of the prophet was a constant bone of contention between these dogs of empire. It was the buffer-state of the ancient East, the Belgium of the Asia of that day.

Isaiah lived to see Israel carried into exile by Tiglath-pileser and Sargon, kings of Assyria. He had witnessed the invasion of Judah by Sen-

nacherib; had seen the destruction of his vast army by "the angel of the Lord." He had sought to steady his country in these troublous times, striving heroically to have them trust in God instead of Egypt or Assyria, or her own ritual religion. As for Judah, Uzziah had just died, bringing a fifty-year reign of good things to an end. But as Uzziah went down to the grave, clouds began to gather on Judah's horizon which, in the reign of Ahaz, ten years later, broke into a terrific storm which ended in sweeping Judah into captivity.

At the beginning of this dark time Isaiah was called to be the prophet of the Lord.

## II. His Call

The crises of history have given birth to most of the prophets of history. It might almost be said that God spake to *all* the prophets in crises, and without a crisis spake He to none of them. Isaiah, being a great prophet, was no exception to this. His call came in what was for him a doubly tragic hour. What was the disturbing thing?

It is expressed in the first words of our text: "In the year that *king Uzziah died*," ah, that was it, king Uzziah had died. And Uzziah for Isaiah and Judah was the good and great king. For fifty years this good and energetic man had been the king of Judah. While Jeroboam II was giving to the Northern Kingdom the most

peaceful and prosperous era of her history, Uzziah was giving to the Southern Kingdom his good and equally strong and brilliant reign. The old king had come to stand high in the esteem of the people. The young prophet had chosen him as his ideal hero. Isaiah was the preacher at the royal court, and to him Uzziah was the wise and venerable king. Like all up-looking, high-minded young men, Isaiah was a hero worshiper, and small wonder that he all but idolized the man who had achieved such great things for his people. When the king died it was a hard blow to the prophet. The best king Judah had had since David was gone. The most splendid reign since Solomon's was ended. Clouds of calamity loomed thick and threatening in Judah's political sky.

But it was not merely the death of the king that so troubled Isaiah, but the *kind* of death he died. God had been with Uzziah. He had been helped until he was strong like David. But like David also, when distinction, wealth, and power were his he had not the grace or restraint to use them wisely. He grew careless of his walk before God. He left off being the humble man that he once was. He lost his fine sense of reverence. He came to attribute his good success wholly to his own genius. Pride and vanity got the better of him. In the flush of his kingly arrogance and disregard for things holy, one day he went into the Temple and "stretched forth his hands to a



holy task that God had reserved for others." He usurped the office of the priest. He was smitten with leprosy, and stood a loathsome figure in the courts of the Lord. The leprosy of sin had already infected his soul, the dreadful disease now appeared on his body. The king hastened to go out, and in the streets of Jerusalem men whispered one to another what had befallen the king. Uzziah never went back to the Temple. He never entered his palace again. He was hurried off to the leper colony, where he lived thenceforth a sequestered life and died a shameful death. The glory of fifty years sank into a loathsome grave. Isaiah was nonplussed, bewildered.

In deep sorrow of heart and perplexity of soul the young prophet, "thoughtful and serious beyond his years," went into the Temple to find comfort and to meditate on God's ways. In that murky hour, his spirits drooped, he stood alone on the Temple floor. As he stood there rapt in profound thought, the earthly Temple became the heavenly; earthly things faded from sight and he surveyed the eternal realities.

He passed the flaming bounds of place;  
The living throne, the sapphire blaze  
Where angels tremble while they gaze.

He saw "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." Hovering in the shadowy background were the heavenly seraphs serving and praising God. It

was an overwhelming vision of the majesty and glory of the Eternal—a glory far greater than what had been Uzziah's. The splendor of Uzziah's reign had only filled little Judah, and that only for a little time, but the glory of his new-found King fills the broad earth forever. "The whole earth is full of his glory."

When Isaiah could no longer see his earthly king upon his earthly throne, he saw the King Eternal upon His eternal throne. His idol king had to be taken away before he saw the real King. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts." Is it not often so with us? It is often not until some fond idol of ours has been removed that we come to see the Lord. Then we point back to some crucial experience when through our tears we saw Him clearly. It was not until Uzziah had been brought very low—and Isaiah with him—that the prophet saw the great King in His beauty. It was the Lord on His throne over against the earthly prince on his. Uzziah had sunk into a leper's grave, but the vision of the Lord of glory rose upon the prophet in dazzling splendor. It was a golden sunrise after a gloomy sunset.

It is a magnificent thing to be able to look back to some cardinal, definite experience as Isaiah could. "The year that king Uzziah died" was a

memorable year for many. Never could men forget that fateful year. But to Isaiah it was the never-to-be-forgotten year, because in that year he not only lost his king, but saw his Lord. To prophet and people alike Uzziah's death was a calamity. It was as if the glory of Judah had suddenly fallen. That was the year when it seemed as if the sun had fallen out of their sky. But though the king had died, God did not, and Isaiah saw Him on His golden throne—*that year*.

Nothing more wonderful could have happened to any man than that. What a difference it made on Isaiah to *see* the Lord! And what a difference it makes on any of us to *see* Him! What a difference it would have made on the Jews, if they, like their prophet, had *seen* the Lord! They had lost the sense of the rule of God over them; as G. A. Smith says, they were acting as if there were a fool on the throne of the universe, for they were given to pious form in religion while spiritual worship and practical righteousness were neglected. They did not live as seeing God, or as if God were alive. What a difference, I repeat, it is bound to make on any of us to live as *seeing* the Lord! But we are materialists, we modern men. The mystic sits lightly upon us. God is not in our thoughts as He should be. That accusing word "Heaven is not as neighborly with us as with men of old" is too true. Our age, too, has a lame conception of God. We need to see God as

Isaiah saw Him—sovereign, august, holy. To see God enthroned in awful majesty is to be filled with reverence and a saving sense of sin; not to see Him is to be blind to our sin and to the best beauties of life. Is it true, as someone has said, that the man who has no sense of sin has very little sense of any kind? I should not like to put it so strong, but there is truth in the remark. At any rate, the man who has no sense of sin will not easily sense the spirit either.

Happy all you who can look back and cherish some cardinal experience which took place in such and such a year—perhaps when you were a young boy or girl at home, perhaps at some altar or service of the Church, perhaps when you were in college, no matter when or where—when you saw the Lord. The writer shall never forget when as a twelve-year old boy, at the altar of a little Methodist church in the South he saw the Lord. He does not hesitate to put it that way. He has seen Him many times since, strives to see Him always, but he likes to recall the specific visions. He remembers another time when he saw the Lord yet more clearly. Through failure of health he had been forced to give up school. It looked as if all cherished plans were crushed and fondest hopes deferred, if not defeated. The disappointment drove him to God—once more he *saw* the Lord.

Many of us have failed to see the Lord, until,

like Isaiah, we have stood by the grave of some dear friend, or the sepulcher of some cherished plan, and have seen it close over them. Not until we have passed through the jaws of some spiritual crisis, and have been brought very low, have we seen the Lord.

Let us have a closer look at this Temple experience of the prophet.

1. In the first place, then, *he saw the Lord*. He got a vision of the holiness of God. He saw God as incomparable, unapproachable, and exalted. He was high and lifted up, far superior to men, and distantly separated from them. He was so holy that man in his sin dared not approach Him. The prophet saw that surrounding Jehovah in the august Presence stood the angels in the attitude of respect and profound reverence. Each of the seraphs had six wings; with two he covered his feet, feeling unworthy to serve One so great; with two he covered his face, feeling unworthy even to look at One so holy; with two he flew round the throne of God. The prophet thought if angels hid their faces from the blinding glory, how could human eyes look upon it and live? And as for his people in their corruption, how could they "endure the scorching flame of the divine judgment"? The seraphs encircled the golden throne of God singing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." Uzziah's glory had faded utterly, but



God's glory, he now saw, filled the whole earth. But Israel was living in blindness of this.

As another has pointed out, note that the seraphs did not say of God, "Mighty, mighty, mighty," or "Wealthy, wealthy, wealthy," or "Wise, wise, wise," but "Holy, holy, holy." How significant this is! Man's highest aspiration is to be like his Maker in holiness. Hugh Price Hughes once said, "You could not offer a more deadly insult to an old Roman gentleman than to insinuate that his character was 'godly' or 'godlike,' for the gods of the Romans were liars, thieves, adulterers, and scoundrels of the most degraded type." It is the supreme achievement of the Hebrew prophets that they reveal God as holy, and show that man is to reach his highest by striving to be like God. How different, this, from the brutal gods of the nations! Take Assyria, for example. The kings of Assyria moved in the power of their brutal and stormy gods. They constantly speak of trampling their enemies into the dust, and of strewing them as dust upon the sea. They tell of their chariots equipped with scythes to mow the peoples down; of their wheels rusty and clogged with human blood; of great baskets stuffed with the salted heads of their foes. The Assyrians were like the gods they knew. Every man is like the god he worships. No man rises higher than his conception of his god. You are as good or as bad as your conception of God.

If you have a noble conception of God, you will live nobly; if base, you will live basely. Isaiah and the Hebrew prophets reveal God as good and holy.

2. In the next place, *it was a personal experience*, "*I saw the Lord.*" God and the prophet were face to face. "Then said I, Woe is me!" Religion is never real unless it is personal. Religion is the life of God within, not something we may outwardly put on as a suit of clothes. That was Israel's trouble, she made religion an appendage, a dead, external thing. Are there not multitudes who still look upon religion as a sort of necessary evil to be held on to, instead of a sunny and beautiful life to be lived and cherished and sought after?

3. Then, too, *he got a vision of himself, a vision of sin.* When the revelation of the holiness of God burst upon him, the revelation of his own unholiness came home with startling force, and he cried, "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips." It is curious that he thought first of his lips. Can it be, as some have thought, that he had been a profane young man? Hardly, since he was court preacher at the palace. Had he in haste accused God of harshness in smiting his beloved king with the terrible leprosy? We shall never know perhaps. At any rate, he had spoken words which he now regretted. His lips were unclean.

Here he is in the Temple where men and angels are praising God. But he cannot join them, for

he is a "man of unclean lips." He knows he cannot praise God until his heart and lips are clean. To attempt it would be mere "lip service." He feels, like Uzziah, an intruder into the holy place. Will he also be driven out? No; because, unlike the king, he is repentant, and is fitted to draw nigh even to God All-Holy. He sighed for pardon. Then the angel took a glowing stone off the altar of sacrifice and touched his lips, and he was pure. The Divine fire had purged away his sin. Then, as now, confession was swiftly followed by cleansing. As soon as the confession was off his lips, the shining seraph *flew* on the wings of mercy and touched his sin away.

4. It was now that he saw *his duty*. He had seen God, himself, and his sin. He had felt his sin go and cleansing consecration come. He now saw his duty clearly. When he saw the need, immediately he heard the call. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Notice he did not hear the call until he had been made clean, and until he had consecrated himself. We are not only unfit to "go" for God until we are cleansed and consecrated, but we cannot even hear His call, much less do His will. To be cleansed is to see the great need; and to *see* the need is to *hear* the call. God did not ask Isaiah outright to go, but sounded in his inner ear, the general call, "Who will go?" He was young, but youth is no hindrance. The cleansing, the consecration, and

the vision are all sufficient. Vision must ever end in service or fade and die.

The leprosy had killed Uzziah; he was gone. And the sinful leprosy of the prophet was gone; but he is called to be a prophet to a people cursed with the leprosy of sin. He had been the preacher at the court; he is now to be a prophet to the peoples. The task upon which he is sent is a most difficult one. He is assured before going that he will have no success. The ears of the people will only become duller and their hearts harder for his preaching. This young man begins his ministry under no illusions, but

So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When Duty whispers low, "Thou must,"  
The youth replies, "I can!"

He shrank greatly at the first but went forth now with eagerness to his difficult task, saying, as some Sir Galahad:

My strength is as the strength of ten,  
Because my heart is pure.

### III. His Ideas

Isaiah had the richest and most varied mind of all the prophets. He has enriched the world with many grand ideas, but only two or three can be mentioned here.

1. Take, first, *his spiritual view of religion*. In a day when ritual and formal sacrifice was held to

be the only valid means of pardon and worship, Isaiah asserted that God desired the spiritual worship of the heart. In the Temple where men were thinking to make atonement for sin with animal sacrifices, he offers God only the spiritual sacrifice of his heart. In the Divine Presence he was himself the altar, the offering, and the offerer. In a place redolent with suggestions of physical sacrifice, "he offered the purely spiritual one of confession." He saw the utter futility of ritual when the heart was not in it. "To what purpose," he demands, "is the multitude of your sacrifices?" and declares, as Amos and Micah before him had done, that God is tired of all such. God wants them to cleanse their ways, to "cease to do evil," and "learn to do well." He bids them leave off this thoughtless, meaningless, unreasonable religiousness. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord."

Isaiah was one of the earliest and sanest apostles of faith. His wisdom gave him deeper insight into the affairs of his own day, and his faith carried him forth in accurate vision further than most prophets. He lived in a day vexed with sinister troubles, yet his motto was, "In quietness and confidence your strength shall be." Imagine this when old Sennacherib was storming the gates of Jerusalem! He steadfastly held that Jerusalem would not fall, and it did not *in his day*.

2. His doctrine of the Remnant. Isaiah wished



to preach by every means possible. For three years he had gone about the streets stripped and barefoot as a protest against making alliance with Egypt and a sign that in this manner his people should be led away into captivity. Like Hosea, he preached by the names of his children. He had two sons, to whom he gave names symbolical of the judgment and blessing to come. To one he gave a name which meant, "Swift is the spoil, speedy the prey." Captivity was coming for Judah. But they would not all be destroyed; a Remnant would be saved, he said, so he gave his other son a name which meant, "A remnant shall return." Once more judgment and mercy were inseparably wedded.

3. His conception of the Messiah. He saw that the nation and her cherished institutions would pass, but that there would be a spiritual people on and on, and God would be with them. To the Remnant, He will be Immanu-El, God with us. In the Temple vision he had seen God as the unapproachable and holy One, but he had also seen God as *near*. The throne of glory was also the throne of grace. God is a God of love; while He dwells "in the high and holy place," He loves best to dwell in contrite human hearts.

Immeasurable is the highest; who but knows it?  
And yet a human heart can perfectly enclose it.

He saw the heart as the best of all temples. From it, and not from smoking sacrifices offered by

unspiritual hands, did true worship come. God would come down as Messiah among men to save us from our sins. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder." Is it too much to say that this prophet of the far vision anticipated Christ the Lord? I do not think so. He was one of those "prophet bards" whose long vision glimpsed "the age of gold."

For lo! the days are hastening on  
By prophet bards foretold,  
When with the ever circling years  
Comes round the age of gold;  
When Peace shall over all the earth  
Its ancient splendors fling.

## CHAPTER V

### HABAKKUK: THE PROPHET WHO SCOLDED GOD

O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!—Habakkuk 1:2.

One cannot read the first chapter of the prophecy of Habakkuk without feeling that the prophet is scolding God. Habakkuk was a close student of world affairs. For a long time he had kept his eye on the march of evil which had become ever more imposing. He had seen brutality and wrong ride on unimpeded in terrible triumph over the right. Truth and goodness seemed trampled into the dust with apparently no power or prospect of rising. The prophet had dared all the while to believe that right would eventually prevail, and that wrong, no matter how formidable or victorious, would presently crash, making way for the sure triumph of the right.

Habakkuk had waited long and patiently for that time to come. But it did not come. On the other hand, wrongs yet more portentous and threatening loomed everywhere. The prophet's soul was harrowed. His spirit was crushed. His faith in a God of love and power and justice was

breaking. In great exasperation and agony of spirit, he cried to God, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" He declared he had for a long time called upon Jehovah to curb the wrong, but that He had paid no attention. Huge crimes against God and man flourished as if God did not see or care. The prophet could not understand it.

Habakkuk lived in the most desperate day of Hebrew history. Like Hosea before him and Jeremiah his contemporary, he was a martyr, not that he was burned at the stake or otherwise physically tortured, but a martyr in that his spirit was crushed, and his faith so frightfully put to the test that it all but failed. He preached, it seems, about ten years before the destruction of Jerusalem, at which time his people were swept into Babylonian exile. He lived in one of the cruelest and bloodiest ages of history. It was an age of kingdom shaking and kingdom making. Nations were going to their death; others were trying to be born. Hundreds of loose, roving tribes of men were seeking to settle and federate themselves into independent states. Empires were on the march. For more than five centuries Assyria, that kingdom of iron and blood, had kept the necks of the nations of Asia under her galling yoke. By the mail fist of brute force and pitiless coercion, her kings had ruthlessly crushed

every people which had attempted to exist as an independent nation. Every tribe or nation which did not willingly bite the dust and pay tribute to invincible Assyria was quickly annihilated.

For a long time the Jews had been vassals of this savage nation and, feeling themselves to be the people of God, and the possessors of the true religion, they fretted and groaned under the yoke of the heathen. Their great prophets, who had not spared their own sins, came to denounce their conquerors as proud, ruthless, and hateful to God.

A glance at history will serve to make more real the true character of the age in which Habakkuk lived. Let us look at some of the kings of Assyria and their doings of a few centuries leading up to the time of our prophet.

Ashurnacirpal was the first of a long line of remorseless and cruel monsters who reigned as kings of Assyria from 1000 B.C. to the destruction of the Jewish state more than four centuries later, whose delight it was to maim, flay, burn, destroy, and humiliate their enemies. In capturing a certain city, this king tells us in an inscription which he has left, "I assaulted and took the city. Three thousand warriors I slew in battle. Their booty and possessions, cattle, sheep, I carried away; many captives I burned with fire. Many of their soldiers I took alive; of some I cut off hands and limbs; of others the noses, ears, and arms; of many soldiers I put out



the eyes. I reared a column of the living and a column of heads. I hung up on high their heads on trees. . . . Their boys and girls I burned up in the flame. I devastated the city, dug it up, in fire burned it; I annihilated it.”<sup>1</sup>

This heartless ruler was followed by Shalmaneser II, whose long reign was but a series of bloody campaigns against the nations.

After him came Tiglathpileser III, who began that horrible practice of uprooting and transporting peoples by the hundred thousand from their homeland and putting in their places peoples of some other conquered race. Imagine the plight of people facing the prospect of being torn up from their homes and peppered down among strange foreign peoples of a distant land! This is just what Shalmaneser IV and Sargon did with the Ten Tribes of the Northern Kingdom. In 722 B.C. Sargon destroyed Samaria and carried into captivity the Israelites where they in this way perished from history.

The last three rulers of Assyria were among the worst butchers of all human history. Their crimes against humanity, their wholesale butchery of the nations must have been fresh in the mind of Habakkuk, especially those of Ashurbanipal.

In the days when Isaiah was prophet in Judah and Hezekiah was king, Sennacherib invaded the

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<sup>1</sup> Goodspeed: *A History of the Babylonians and Assyrians*, p. 197. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Used by permission.

land. He "came down like a wolf on the fold." "All his country," says the proud Assyrian, "I swept like a mighty whirlwind; forty-six strong cities I ravaged, destroyed, burnt with fire; the smoke of their burning like a mighty cloud obscured the face of high heaven, Hezekiah himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem, his royal city. . . . As for Hezekiah the fear of the majesty of my dominion overwhelmed him."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to tell how he carried off the king's daughters, the women of his palace, many musicians of Jerusalem, besides money, ivory, and much other treasure to Nineveh, his capital. It is certain that Judah would have been doomed had not the army of Sennacherib been suddenly and mysteriously destroyed in a single night, which thing compelled him to return to Nineveh.

This same heartless monarch utterly destroyed Babylon, one of the grandest and oldest cities of the world. Her stately temples and palaces he leveled to the ground. Her walls he demolished. Her inhabitants he slaughtered. The entire city he burned, and turned a canal from its bed and caused its waters to flow over the ruins. It has been truly said that this overthrow of Babylon was one of "the wildest scenes of folly in all human history." But Sennacherib loved to do such things. He never got done boasting of his shameful inhumanities.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Cuneiform Parallels of the Old Testament*, ch. 8, by R. W. Rogers, the Abington Press, New York.

And, like father, like son. As Sennacherib had destroyed Babylon and the cities of Judah, so Esarhaddon, his cruel son, destroyed Sidon and the great cities of Egypt. In his inscriptions he boasts of having about him in Nineveh throngs of captives with rings in their lips doing him homage. He took the heads of the kings he had overthrown and hung them upon the necks of their great men. And yet an Assyrian inscription calls Esarhaddon "a pious man"! He has been called "the noblest and most sympathetic figure among the Assyrian kings"! In comparison with the supremely brutal Ashurbanipal, his son and successor, doubtless he was mild; for of all these plunderers of the nations and "royal butchers" of mankind, Ashurbanipal was the worst. Of those who had filled Nineveh with the spoils of humanity, he surpassed them all. He was the cruelest of the cruel kings of that cruel age. He boasted more than all the rest of his violence. He was fond of telling how he tore off the limbs and lips of kings; of how he forced four captured princes to haul him in his chariot through the streets; of how he compelled a conquered prince to wear round his neck the head of a murdered king; of how he and his queen feasted in his palace gardens while the head of a Chaldean king, whom he had caused to commit suicide, hung suspended from a tree above them!<sup>1</sup>

These crimes are all the blacker, if possible, be-

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<sup>1</sup> *History of the Babylonians and Assyrians.*

cause they were done in the name of religion. Ashurbanipal was devoted to the religion of Nineveh. He claimed to do all he did at the bidding of the gods who loved him and gave him his power. But the cruel religion of these kings was used only as a cloak for savage aggression. They waded

through slaughter to a throne,  
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind.

Habakkuk was compelled to witness such deeds as these. He brooded over them. Would not his people suffer a similar fate? It looked so. But would Jerusalem go as Babylon and Memphis and Thebes had gone? Would God suffer Zion to go down like these capitals of the heathen? The Northern Tribes had long been in exile. Egypt had lately fallen. Her great cities lay in ruins. Plainly, it could not be long till Jerusalem's time would come. Would the Holy City and the Temple be destroyed?

Then came the fall of Nineveh herself, as the prophet Nahum had predicted. It was unexpected and swift. The great city, which had been the capital of the war lords of Assyria for more than five hundred years, was ruined by the Medes and Babylonians in 612 B.C.

Nineveh was the best fortified city in the ancient world, and thought to be impregnable. It was surrounded by a wall one hundred feet high, and so thick that three chariots could roll abreast on

its top. At each entrance there were two and three walls with deep, wide moats between full of flowing water. It had looked as if the powerful capital of this atrocious race would never be taken. Nineveh dropped suddenly from the height of her glory to her doom. This is what both Nahum and Jonah had so much longed to see. "In a few years the ivory palaces of Nineveh were deserted, her splendid chariots lay riderless on the highways," the blare of the war trumpets of Assyria were mute; they would make the nations to tremble no more. The silence of the desert reigned where proud, populous Nineveh had stood.

So complete was the ruin of Nineveh that a Greek historian passed over the site two hundred years after her fall without so much as knowing that any such capital had existed there. It is said that Alexander the Great marched by the place, "not knowing that a world empire was buried under his feet." Nahum had foreseen her coming fall and welcomed it. Expressing the pent-up feelings of generations of sufferers at her hands, he had chanted "the death dirge of the world's greatest oppressor." He believed that the Hand of God must fall heavily upon the brutal kingdom. He knew that though "the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small." He welcomed the day when the lofty foe of God's people, who took pride in making "pyramids of human heads," should be humbled.



One does not like to censure Nahum for this, for truly "No power more useless, more savage, more terrible, ever cast its gigantic shadow on the page of history" than that of ruthless Assyria. These people live before us still in their monuments and inscriptions which tell of their fiendish delight in frightful and diabolical brutalities.

Habakkuk had lived through distressing scenes. Doubtless he was pleased with the fall of Nineveh, feeling that God had at last been just to the "bloody city, full of lies and robbery." But once more hope was deferred. Things did not seem bettered. Nineveh had perished, but wrong flourished as ever.

In the place of Assyria, Babylon has revived. The new Chaldean empire, just as ruthless and aggressive as Assyria, is on the march. Nebuchadnezzar is conquering right and left. The prophet sees that Jerusalem and the Chosen People are threatened. It is only a matter of time now, as Jeremiah had been saying, till the Jewish state must succumb. His soul is deeply troubled. What is to become of the Covenant people? Will the religion of Jehovah perish? Is God too weak to save the honor of His name, or is He simply indifferent? In any case, why does not God do something? How long will He stand by while wickedness and high-handed knavery does its worst, and not intervene? How long will He suffer the impious pagans to mock Him?

✓ Habakkuk wanted to know where God was and what He was doing; so far as he could see, He was doing nothing as He ought. It looked to him as if the whole world was going to pieces, especially did it look as if the cause of religion was sinking. For centuries arrogant, inhuman tyrants have trampled upon men more righteous than themselves. And now the Jews, sure that they will soon come under the heel of the savage oppressor from Babylon, have lost faith in God and are giving themselves up to all manner of sins, saying, "Let us rob, eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Sensualism, folly, and desperation reigned.

Our prophet had witnessed the sweeping reforms of the good king Josiah and had rejoiced in them. Then he had seen the good man fall in battle with the ruling bully of Egypt. A vicious weakling had come to the throne of the Jews, not to carry on his father's work, but to intercept and undo it. One week of Jehoiakim had wrecked Josiah's noble reforms. It was all darkness to Habakkuk. He could see no smallest glimmer of light. All was gloomy and overcast. Dark, haunting doubt filled the prophet's mind and he expressed himself in words harsh with blasphemy. He said God permitted vile hands to work havoc in His world and did nothing to prevent it.

Habakkuk has been called "the father of Israel's religious doubt." But "he who never doubted

never thought." Habakkuk was the first skeptic among the Hebrew prophets, and yet a man of strong faith. His faith became the stronger for his doubts, for as Browning says:

You must mix some uncertainty  
With faith if you would have faith be.

When at length the complaining prophet's fury had subsided, God told him that he was mistaken. He said if he would look more closely he would see that things were not so bad as he thought. He told him that He was getting ready to do a thing which it would be hard for him (inclined as he was not to see Israel's sins) to believe when he saw it. God told the prophet that He was getting the Chaldeans, "that bitter and hasty nation," ready to march through the land and punish Judah for her sins. "You want me to do something," said Jehovah, "I am going to do something, I am about to destroy Judah."

Habakkuk was stunned. He knew his people to be far from blameless, knew that they merited God's displeasure, but surely not destruction. He wanted reform, but not too much reform. He wanted wrongs righted, but not Jerusalem overthrown. Again he took God to task. He said, "You have raised up the Chaldeans to chastise Judah, but you are a holy God, and cannot condone iniquity, why then, do you look upon them that deal treacherously, and keep silent when the

wicked spoil those who are better than they?" He wondered that God would use a barbarous nation to chastise His people. He was sorely perplexed, still asking as Jeremiah and Job asked, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?"

Who shall read us the riddle of life?  
The continual sequence of pain,  
The perpetual triumph of wrong,  
The whole creation in travail to make  
A victory for the strong?

How are we fettered and caged  
Within our dark prison-house here!  
We are made to look for a loving plan;  
We find everywhere error and fear.

We look for the triumph of good;  
And from all the wide world around,  
The lines that are spent cry upward to heaven  
From the slaughter-house of the ground  
Till we feel that evil is lord.

This was the way Habakkuk felt—that evil was lord.

✓ All other prophets set themselves to find out what was the matter with Israel; Habakkuk set himself to find out what was the matter with God. All other prophets spoke to the people for God; Habakkuk spoke to God for the people. The very word "prophet" means one who speaks on God's behalf, but Habakkuk was the mouthpiece of a stricken people, an advocate who voiced their protest to the throne. "How long, O Lord? We are like worms before thee." His was a

plaintive, poignant plea for relief from fearful national oppression and from yet more fearful mental torture. He scolded God and said, "When we call you do not hear!" Why did the good God permit churlish tyrants to trample the innocent?

But Habakkuk was reasonable. He said he ✓ would take his stand on his watchtower and wait for God's answer to his plea. He was still convinced, however, that God was going about a right thing in the wrong way. So up to the top of his watchtower he went. Habakkuk had a secret high tower, a Divine trysting place, where he and God talked things over together. It was there above life's strife and tumult that God gave this baffled preacher a better vision of things. He told him—and the troubled man saw it now—that it was faith that he needed—faith to believe in the ultimate triumph of truth—that right, not wrong, in the end would win. Habakkuk needed to argue less and trust more. God agreed that the Chaldeans were a people puffed and vain and that their misdoings should have their reward, but He said, "The righteous shall live by his faith." Let the righteous, however baffled, hold on by faith to God, and he shall be satisfied. The troubled prophet got the lesson. From the watchtower of faith he had "viewed the landscape o'er" and had come "to see things steadily and see them whole."

Martin Luther in other days when truth was obscured and faith decayed, climbed on the same



watchtower, got a new vision and glimpsed a better day for the Church. Habakkuk learned that true righteousness does not lie in material and outward triumph, but in inward faith and holiness. "The righteous shall live by his faith." The same moving truth fired Luther's soul, and he went preaching "justification by faith." To a Church seeking to live on dead ritual and empty works, he said, "The righteous shall live by faith." A new Church was born—rather the old Church reborn. Protestantism arose to revive God's Church in the midst of the years.

✓ It was a grand lesson Habakkuk learned—one which we all need to learn—to trust and bide God's time. Righteousness may not triumph in my day or yours, but it will in God's. This prophet had been saved by faith.

It was a similar experience that saved the Psalmist, who said, "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He saw that in time the wicked, like Nineveh, would come to his own. And Habakkuk saw that if the Chaldeans destroyed the Jews, they would in turn be destroyed themselves. His people might go into dark exile, but goodness and truth would not perish. Truth and right might temporarily seem defeated, but will rise after a time and bloom forth into new beauty and power.

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the  
throne—  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim  
unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above  
his own.

God had answered the tortured prophet. This honest doubter found rest where all honest doubters may find it—in God. Assured of the Divine sympathy in all things, “The troubled spirit of Habakkuk grows calm and the saddest prophecy ends with a song.” He was now singing of the time when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.” This most skeptical of all the prophets could now have said with Paul, “All things work together for good to those who love God. . . . O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

Then welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit, nor stand, but go!  
Be our joys three-parts pain!  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the  
throe!

## CHAPTER VI

### JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET OF THE HEART

His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones.—Jeremiah 20:9.

I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it.—Jeremiah 31:33.

Jeremiah was the prophet of the heart. He himself had a wonderful heart, most tender, sensitive, and spiritual. Dr. Whyte of Scotland says, "Jeremiah was far and away the most spiritually minded of all the prophets; he was of all the prophets of the Old Testament the supreme prophet of God to the human heart, and for a long time laid siege to the hearts of his hearers."

This prophet was forever talking about the heart. Run through his book and you will quickly see that "heart" is a word most frequently on his lips. He first explored the depths of his own heart, he next came close to the heart of God, and then set about to sound the hearts of his people. Jeremiah took heed to himself. He looked well into his own heart, knowing that out of it were the issues of life and death. He steadfastly gazed within. True, he was introspective—forever taking stock of his soul; but one must

look deeply into his own life, and know it, before he can look out upon the lives of his fellows with healing and help. One must be introspective before he can be prospective. And one must know much of both hell and heaven before he can know much of the human heart, for both are there; and the surest way to look down into the mouth of hell or up into the face of God, is to look into the abysmal depths of one's own heart. Jeremiah looked once into his heart and there saw the sordid workings of sin; he looked again and saw the designing Hand of God. Had he taken but the one look (as multitudes do), he would have gone out a confirmed pessimist instead of the great physician of hearts that he was. How fortunate for him that he took the healthier view! He was now prepared to probe successfully and estimate rightly the hearts of his fellows. He had searched his own heart; had come to know the greatness of the heart of God; he could now explore the hearts of men. And few men have ever ransacked the human heart as did Jeremiah. And it was because he had looked well into his own first. John Wesley never warmed the hearts of the men of England until his own had first been "strangely warmed," and before we can hope to touch the hearts of men our own must first have been touched. Jeremiah stands out as the greatest "heart specialist" of the Old Testament, and one of the greatest of religious history. God played

upon this great heart as the master musician plays upon the harp, and from that day till this Jeremiah has been touching into music the heartstrings of humanity.

This prophet came to see the heart as the seat of sin. "The heart," he said, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

False above all is the heart,  
Sick to despair,  
Who can know it?<sup>1</sup>

Sin, in whatever form it lays its foul fingers upon a life to soil or blight it, springs directly from out the heart, says Jeremiah. But he saw the heart as the source of all conduct, good and bad. It is not only the seat and citadel of sin in man, but the fountainhead of religion and all that is good as well. The heart is the governing center of man's being, and the worst and best in his life spring from it.

It was this truth that later led the prophet to see the need of a "new" heart. He saw that if the conduct of men, long in the practice of sin, was to become good, that somehow their hearts must be changed. He saw that no good thing could come from a man if his heart be evil, and that, try as he might, man himself could not change it. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin,

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<sup>1</sup> Version of G. A. Smith, *Jeremiah, the Book, the Man, the Prophet*, p. 371. Used by permission, George H. Doran Co., New York.



or the leopard his spots?"—can the black man by any effort of his alter the color of his skin, or the spotted leopard his spots?—if so, "then may ye also do good, that are *accustomed* to do evil." He was beginning to see what we now know so well: that long-practiced habits of sin are fast-binding, and can be broken only by the entrance into the heart of the Divine Spirit. He saw that, instead of the old stony heart, man must come to have a heart made tender by God and capable of receiving the impress of His Spirit. God must give men new hearts before He can begin to make of them "new creatures."

This prophet was seeing far. New truth was breaking upon him. He was then witnessing the failure of the Old Covenant; he lived in a day when the covenant nation was fast going to pieces. Israel had already gone into captivity, and Judah was now living on the very edge of doom. Soon the chosen nation would be swallowed up in the Exile; the old order of things was crashing; soon it would be but a tradition of the past. It looked like black defeat for the cause of God, and, at first, greatly saddened the prophet; but new visions of truth were given him. He came to "see things steadily and see them whole," and to believe that God could not be defeated. He saw that upon the ruins of that Old Covenant God would bring about a new and better order. He would make a New Covenant with man. He

would have a New People. Mankind would have a New Religion—a religion of faith, of the Spirit, of the heart!

### His Call

The call of Jeremiah is most interesting. He was only a poor youth whose home was in the village of Anathoth, not more than an hour's walk from Jerusalem. He was therefore in close touch with life in the great capital. Near-by was Shiloh where Eli and Samuel had served the Ark in a sanctuary now in ruins. He was a member of a humble, but religious home. His fathers were of the priestly line that had served Jehovah's altars from the days of Aaron down to Solomon. But Solomon brought to an end Abiathar's line and set up Zadok and a new priesthood. The old was banished. Jeremiah was of this banished priestly house. He was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe which gave to Israel Saul, her first king, and Jonathan, and Eli, and that greatest of all Benjamites, Paul. His family, though no longer one of influence and power, was one that must have cherished happy memories in Israel. It is not to be wondered at that with such ancestors and memories as these young Jeremiah was religious and up-looking.

Anathoth lay back off the main highways and bordered hard on the edge of the wilderness. It was in this secluded village when he was yet

young that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet of the Lord to Judah.

The desert has given the world some of its greatest teachers of religion. One thinks of Moses of Midian, and Abraham of the plains of Ur. The same desert landscape which produced Jeremiah and Amos, also gave to the world John the Baptist, the herald of Christ and last of the Hebrew prophets. It was in this same wilderness, too, that our Lord met and vanquished the Tempter and went forth the chiefest, most triumphant of all the prophets.

The call of Jeremiah was different from that of any other prophet. It was so ordinary. There was nothing of the splendid, dazzling vision of the holiness of God which put Isaiah on his face upon the Temple floor. There was nothing of the overpowering sense of the glory and greatness of God which Ezekiel saw when called to the same office. Nor was he, like Moses, constrained to remove his shoes because of the sanctity of the place. He did not feel the Lord lay hold of him and stop him, as Amos did, when commissioned to preach to Israel. There was, in fact, nothing about the call of Jeremiah that was unusual, unless it was the simplicity of it.

We are struck with the familiarity, the audacity of this man. He parleys with God as if talking to his most familiar friend. He is not silenced or prostrated before the Lord. Nor did he quickly

respond to His call, as Isaiah did, who said, "Here am I; send me"; to the contrary, he shrank greatly from the unpleasant task he was told awaited him. He stoutly protested against being the bearer of the Lord's message to his stiff-necked and hard-hearted people. He knew it would be the most thankless vocation a man could possibly have in his nation at that time. Perhaps he recalled the treatment the prophets before him had received at their hands. Had they not rejected Amos and the wet-eyed Hosea? And had not the men of Manasseh's day (which he probably could remember) barbarously killed the far-visioned Isaiah? And if they had so treated the best friend that Jerusalem ever had, what could he hope for at their hands?

Was it thoughts like these which made him diffident now? At any rate he drew back from such a course. He was unwilling to go. He said, "Ah, Lord God, I know not how to speak, I am too young, I am but a youth in Israel; how can I speak to this people?" He was untrained as a speaker, he lacked knowledge; was inexperienced in facing the public; how could he do it? Could he ever bring himself to face their scorn and frowns? Then he heard Jehovah saying to him, "Be not afraid because of them: for I am with thee to deliver thee." Then he tells us that God put forth His hand and touched his mouth, and said unto him, "Behold, I have put my words in

thy mouth." He was told that he must be a prophet in Judah and unto the nations. Well might he tremble and shrink from such a task! But the Lord would not let him off. He said, "Gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at them lest I dismay thee before them." He was assured that God would make of him a brazen wall against which the people would fight in vain.

Kings, princes, priests, people will all be arrayed against him, but God will be with him. And so, driven to it, he went forth upon a course which he well knew would bring down upon his head the hot wrath of a godless priesthood, a worthless king, and a conscienceless people. It was Jeremiah, a solitary, defenseless prophet against the nation. No wonder he was staggered! Well might he tremble and draw back! But

Steel thy melting heart  
To act the martyr's sternest part,  
To watch with firm, unshrinking eye,  
Thy darling visions as they die,  
Till all bright hopes, and hues of day,  
Have faded into twilight gray.

### The Man and His Career

The prophet, then, was under no delusion. He knew his lot would be one of opposition, disappointment, and suffering. So certain was he of this that his courage all but failed and he almost refused to go.



Fierce opposition and much suffering did come—and more than he had dared to think. God never put upon any servant of His, save the Son of Man Himself, a harder task than He put upon Jeremiah. He was a tender, modest, yielding young man, with the most womanly heart of all the prophets; he was deeply religious and intensely patriotic in the best sense; he rejoiced in his people's well-being and grieved over their misfortunes, and yet he must be to them always and nothing to the tragic end but a preacher of evil things, a prophet of doom! Was ever a man placed in a more painful dilemma?

Jeremiah had not the fiery might of Elijah, or the easy eloquence of Isaiah, or the unsullied boldness of Amos: he was a shrinking, self-conscious man who craved leave to retire from all strife and unpleasant things. Isaiah, called to a similar task, hastened to say, "Here am I; send me," but Jeremiah spent much time in "complaint and in debate both with God and his fellow men," and seemed never to become reconciled to his trying vocation.

He went about his duty, however, with fine courage; he pursued his calling heroically, and preached unflinchingly, but he never did it with ease as Amos did. Amos bore a burning message of law and judgment to Israel willingly, and appeared to take pleasure in it. He could hurl the smiting word of Jehovah against His sinful people

seemingly without fear or pain, but the tender-natured Jeremiah could not; he could shoot the missiles of God as effectively as Amos could, but it was as if everyone had struck home in his own breast first. He could not smite his fellow men, even if God commanded it, and even if he knew they deserved it, without deeply paining his own heart. He could not wound his brother's heart without wounding his own yet more; and he would say as he did so, "O my heart, my heart, I am pained at my very heart." It is a good man who, when denouncing sin—as good men must—feels the backward stroke upon his own heart, and he who feels it not must have a heart of stone.

After all does not any true man feel as Jeremiah felt? What am I to bear the message of God to men? Who am I to challenge public opinion? Should not one feel about it as he did—"I am but a child"?

This preacher-prophet could have said "No" to the voice of God and conscience, and could have gone smiling through life assuming no responsibility and avoiding reproach; but he chose the way of duty; chose the unselfish life, for him the hard life. It meant lifelong martyrdom for him to follow God; perhaps it may for some of us too, but if duty demands it of us, as it did of him, our peace lies that way.

I said, "Let me walk in the fields,"  
He said, "No, walk in the town,"  
I said, "There are no flowers there,"  
He said, "No flowers, but a crown."

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Then into His hand went mine,  
And into my heart came He;  
And I walked in a light divine,  
The paths I had feared to see.

## CHAPTER VII

### JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET OF THE HEART (Continued)

The life and career of Jeremiah so often makes one think of Jesus. His suffering and sympathy—what a heart of compassion he had for men! What depth of pity! He made the sins and sorrows of everybody his own until he groaned under the crushing weight of them. So closely did he identify himself with his people that in a real sense he bore their woes. He makes us think of the suffering servant in the book of Isaiah, but of Christ yet more. It is passing strange that this sufferer with his people only won their cold contempt, but it is true. The world has not much patience with the sufferer or the saint. For his love they only hated him, and for his message they had nothing but deaf ears and hot scorn.

This was too much for one so guileless and tender of soul; his shrinking nature revolted at the treatment he got for exposing the sins of his fellows, and he firmly resolved that he would do it no more. He said he would never preach again. "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name." He bitterly complained, "If I must incur the ill-will of my fellows by speaking

the unwelcome truth, if I must live a lonely life [God had forbidden him to have wife or child], if I must be a laughingstock for my enemies, I will not, I cannot, bear to speak any more in the name of the Lord." Once more he complained that he had been given such a task, and wished that he had somewhere a lodging in the wilderness where he might get clean off from men and the scene of their strife. Like Job he regretted that he had been born into a life of intolerable woes, and like him abhorred the day of his birth:

Mother! Ah, me!  
As whom hast thou borne me?  
A man of quarrel and of strife  
To the whole of the land—  
All of them curse me.<sup>1</sup>

He felt as the Saviour felt on the cross men made for Him, when He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

But the prophet is not himself now. This is not the real Jeremiah. He would not be out of life or its strife if he could. His conscience is too alert, his vision of sin and holiness too great, his love of truth and duty too strong. Preach he must, and whether he would or no, for if he tries to refrain, God's word is in his heart as a blazing fire shut up in his bones, and it is harder to forbear than to preach and bear the consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> Version of G. A. Smith, *Jeremiah, the Book, the Man, the Prophet*, p. 319. Used by permission, George H. Doran Co., New York.



He simply cannot contain himself. He is dominated by a mighty emotion. He knows the explosive power of a great affection. It is painful to speak; but it is unbearable agony to be silent.

O my anguish! My anguish, I writhe!  
O the walls of my heart!  
My heart is in storm upon me,  
I cannot keep silence!

Jeremiah has been called "the weeping prophet." How he makes one think of the Man of Sorrows! In many ways he is a striking type of the Master. Like Him he suffered so much and so unjustly too. At the beginning he had felt forbidden to marry, enjoy the comforts of home, or have any part in the pleasures of men. As Professor Peake says, "Jeremiah, whose heart was so exquisitely fitted for love, and to whom a home would have been a welcome refuge from the scorn and cruelty of his fellows, was doomed to a life of loneliness uncheered by wife or children. . . . He was not of naturally morose temper, nor had his isolation soured him; he looked at the felicity of others with no jaundiced eye, but only with the sad conviction that it would soon utterly cease."<sup>1</sup> Why live for pleasure or any passing thing when the nation is dancing on the very edge of doom? Why rear children to be slaves to their captors by Babylon's waters? He said, "Seekest thou

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. Peake, *The Century Bible*, p. 15, Oxford University Press, American Branch, New York. Used by permission.

great things for thyself? seek them not." Why seek the attractive things of earth which are so soon to vanish? Here is a question for all men, tempted as we are, to set too great a store by things passing, and too little by things eternal.

Then what a lonely man Jeremiah is! He is the loneliest figure in the literature of religion until Christ. Not even Elijah, forsaken by his people, hunted by his enraged queen, faint and worn in the wilds of the desert, is more lonely than Jeremiah. He had plenty of familiars, but no friends. True, he moved in the crowds, but had none like minded with himself. None saw as he saw; he was an unknown man; none gave heed to what he said. Always at home and among his own people, yet so lonely. A like isolation was experienced by Queen Victoria. Her husband, the genial and beloved Prince Albert, had died early in life. Bereft of the Prince Consort and left without intimate and equal companionship, the young and widowed queen was deathly lonely. She outlived her husband by nearly a half century, but every day throughout the busy years to her death she never failed to fill a basin with water and provide a towel where Albert was accustomed to wash, that she might recall his presence every morning. Day after day she visited his desk that she might visualize the Prince busy with his daily work. She would often lay out his clothing and imagine herself

preparing to take one of the many delightful journeys they had taken together over Europe. She did not lack for able counselors or flattering familiars, but she had no intimate bosom friend. No ruler of history was ever more prodigiously or constantly engaged, yet she was lonely. It was so with Jeremiah.

I have never been so lonely as when moving with the multitude in Chicago's "Loop," or on New York's "Great White Way." It is bad to be unknown and lonely in the great throng, but to be lonely among one's own people and kin must be as heavy a cross as one can bear. Jeremiah felt most keenly this isolation by his fellows.

Man is the loneliest of creatures anyhow. What soul among us understands another, much less a prophet?

Thus on the sea of life enisled,  
With echoing straits between us thrown,  
Dotting the shoreless, watery wild,  
We mortal millions live, alone.

Jeremiah was unknown in the real sense, therefore unappreciated; all wished to get rid of him. They were tired of his Temple sermons, tired of his cutting reproaches and his constant predictions of coming evil. Priests, princes, and people alike have all been stung into stolid opposition to him. Even his own family and kin are against him; his neighbors at Anathoth seek to kill him. He is looked on as a traitor—for it is war time in

Jerusalem—and for his supposed disloyalty he is savagely handled. Time after time he has been beaten and incarcerated in the dungeon. He is in prison now. One hears the apostle to the Gentiles, some centuries later, moaning in his prison at Rome, “Only Luke is with me.” If we could know what Jeremiah is saying now, it would probably be, “Only Baruch is with me.” Baruch was his *one* faithful friend.

But like John the Baptist in Herod’s dungeon, Jeremiah’s spirit sank. Thick clouds of gloom darkened his soul. Doubt and fear and anger swept over him, and full of a keen sense of the injustice of it all, he groaned, “Why doth the way of the wicked prosper?” He wants to know why right is penalized while high-handed “cussedness” seems ever to triumph? The soul of the prophet was greatly harrowed, and in great exasperation he again complained that God had taken advantage of his inexperience and had beguiled him into an unbearable life. He sighed to be out of it all. His old longing haunted him anew:

O that I had in the wilderness  
A wayfarer’s lodge!  
Then would I leave my people,  
And get away from them;  
For adulterers all of them be,  
A bundle of traitors.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Version of G. A. Smith, *Jeremiah, the Book, the Man, the Prophet*, p. 202. Used by permission, George H. Doran Co., New York.

But the Divine fire smolders in his heart; he cannot keep silence. So he goes on, a prophet to the nations, and a thorn in the side of Judah.

After he had preached and suffered for more than twenty years, his friend Baruch wrote down his sermons in a book. These were read to the people in the Temple. The king heard of the new book and had one of the princes read it to him in his winter house. As the reader read through the roll, at every few pages the king would stop him, and with his penknife cut them out and drop them into the fire in the brazier; he did this until the entire book was cut and burned. This was an added insult to the persecuted prophet; but he rewrote it, this time more completely than before, and so we have his book today.

We are told more about the personal life of Jeremiah than of any other prophet; his character stands out clearly revealed. The study of his great soul in its conflicts, sorrows, and triumphs is thrilling beyond words. He had the heart of a poet, was emotional, passionate, spiritual. "He was by nature an exquisite and sensitive spirit, too delicate and too fragile, it might have seemed, for the rough life of conflict in which his calling engaged him; too shy and nervous to face without shrinking the derision and curses of his fellows. . . . Gentle and trustful, he seemed no match for the open violence



and secret treachery which he again and again encountered. And yet through his long ministry of forty years he faced his foes with the loftiest courage which triumphs over nature, rebuked his people with relentless severity, and contradicted their dearest prejudices . . . His spirit was always tense, strung to a high pitch; he and his vocation had become one.”<sup>1</sup>

His hard and lonely life forced him more and more in upon God. He was above everything “a hero of the inner life, the martyr prophet of spiritual religion.” Though gentle by nature, yet like the lamb of the Apocalypse, his wrath was fierce when aroused in behalf of righteousness.

### His Last Sufferings

I have spoken of how Jeremiah reminds us of Christ. Like Christ, he stood on the border of a dying age to welcome the coming of a new and better while the people clung to the old; like Him, he loved steadfastly and wept over the Holy City; like Him, too, he was rejected and martyred as a traitor to God and man. But he was faithful to the last; even when his city lay a heap of smoking ruins, and he was given a chance to go with its captors to Babylon and live in ease for the rest of his life, he refused. And when he was seized and taken to Egypt by profligate men of his own

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. Peake, *The Century Bible*, pp. 28, 29, Oxford University Press, American Branch, New York. Used by permission.

race, tradition says they killed him because of his burning words against their idolatry and perfidy. All his days he had given his back to the smiters; had been a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and now he is cut off from the land of the living, and though he had done no violence, men made his grave with the wicked.

Jeremiah was surely the bravest figure in the Old Testament, and one of the bravest in all history. His was a stormy voice ever predicting the certain coming of terrible things upon the people he most tenderly loved. No man ever spoke the truth at greater personal sacrifice.

The prophet of the heart is dead in Egypt. O Egypt, thou hast been the scene of many a triumph and tragedy!—a house of bondage to Israel, a temptation to Abraham, and a grave for sorrowful Jeremiah!

The world's prophets have always been men ahead of their age, and have always fared worse at its hands than other men. In all ages the prophet has been the target for smaller men's littleness, licentiousness, spite, and cruelty; he has ever been misunderstood, unwelcomed, spurned. The world has never had much more love for its men of vision than for its visionaries; it usually classes them and treats them alike.

The prophet is an idealist; not satisfied with things as they are, he is critical, he smites, not with arms, but with words, and must always pay

a dear price for his blows. For his vision—Isaiah was sawn asunder; Jeremiah tortured forty years; Socrates made to drink the hemlock; Jesus was crucified, and Paul got the headman's ax. Criminals have always fared better than prophets.

The man is called a fool or knave,  
Or bigot plotting crime,  
Who for the advancement of his race  
Is wiser than his time.  
For him the hemlock shall distill,  
For him the ax be bared,  
For him the scaffold shall be built,  
For him the stake prepared.  
Him shall the scorn and wrath of men  
Pursue with deadly aim,  
And malice, envy, spite, and lies  
Shall desecrate his name.

The world kills its prophets and then erects monuments to their honor and unconsciously fixes as its goal the level of their vision. Prophets are the greatest losers, but—"after many days"—the greatest gainers. They of all men must lose themselves *now* to find themselves *hereafter*.

### The Prophet's Teaching

1. Personal Religion. To Jeremiah, God was a person with whom he could be most intimate: religion was an experience of friendship with God. He dared to be familiar with God. Before Jeremiah, God was thought to be afar off, men adored Him at a distance and dreaded to come

close to Him; but Jeremiah lived in close fellowship with God. To him God was not only the Most High, but the MOST NEAR. He taught that God could be worshiped anywhere—outside the Temple as well as in it. He saw both the nation and the Temple ruined and conceived the human heart to be God's best temple. God is a person, and religion, says Jeremiah, must be a personal experience with God.

2. He saw that sin was a malady of the individual heart. And he was the first to preach individual responsibility to God. He could not think of sin as corporate, affecting the nation only, but as a principle or disposition of evil in the individual life. He called, not only the nation, but the individual to repentance. Nothing but personal repentance will satisfy God and give men peace of mind, he said. Sin is no fiction to be lightly passed over, but a deadly disease of the heart. He had no patience with the ancient perversion modernly expressed:

God is not censorious  
When His children have their fling.

With him sin was an individual as well as a social malady. He declared in effect:

The sins that we do by two and two,  
We must pay for one by one.

3. The New Covenant. The Old Covenant has served its day, says Jeremiah, and is passing.

God is about to make a New Covenant; He will have a new-heart people: "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." The law of duty will no longer be written on tablets of stone or parchment, but will be engraved on the heart. God's people will no longer be governed by a set of rules written in a book, but will be ruled by His law of love in their hearts.

Jeremiah's doctrine of the New Covenant is the highest peak of Old Testament religion, the apex of Old Testament prophecy. It anticipated the work of our Lord and the New Covenant of the Spirit made by Him in His sacrifice of Himself once for all men. More than to any other prophet Christ looked to Jeremiah as the peer of all the old world's religious teachers, and as His own spiritual ideal. It is not strange that some in His day mistook Jesus for Jeremiah risen from the dead.

"We cannot easily overestimate the significance of Jeremiah's doctrine of the New Covenant. It is the supreme achievement of Israel's religion,



and its author was the loftiest genius who adorned the line of the prophets.”<sup>1</sup>

I like the man who faces what he must  
With step triumphant and a heart of cheer;  
Who fights the daily battle without fear;  
Sees his hopes fail, yet keeps unfaltering trust  
That God is God; that somehow, true and just  
His plans work out for mortals; not a tear  
Is shed when fortune, which the world holds dear,  
Falls from his grasp; better with love, a crust  
Than living in dishonor; envies not,  
Nor loses faith in man; but does his best  
Nor ever mourns over his humbler lot,  
But with a smile and words of hope, give zest  
To every toiler; he alone is great  
Who by a life heroic conquers fate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. Peake, *The Century Bible*, p. 46, Oxford University Press, American Branch. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> From the *Poems* of Sarah K. Bolton.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EZEKIEL: THE PROPHET OF HOPE IN DESPAIR

And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.—Ezekiel 37:3.

#### I

In the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel we have the prophet's wonderful vision of the valley of dry bones. It is one of the most weird, and yet one of the most charming, of visions. It is one of the richest products of the spirit-quicken'd imagination to be found anywhere. Nowhere in all literature is there anything, which for sheer grandeur and dreadfulness, surpasses or matches this vision of the valley of bones. It is strange, striking, solemnizing. Let the prophet tell us his story. He says, "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley, and it was full of bones; and he caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry." It was as if this prophet had been set down, you see, in the midst of some spacious battle field where thousands and tens of thousands

had been slain. He is told not only to survey carefully this dreadful valley filled with bones, but to walk round about it, to go up and down in it, until the dreadful sight is very familiar to him. This he did. And, as he ran his eye over this valley filled with human bones—weird, gruesome, chaotic—it was evident that death, and not life, was the master there. Not life but death, reigned supreme in that valley. Look which way he would, all was desolation and death.

The gloom and horror of the tragic scene entered into the soul of the prophet. He stood face to face with two hard, mysterious facts—facts than which there are none greater or more baffling—the fact of life and the fact of death. Both life and death have ever been things hidden, unknown, inexplicable to the human mind. Both constantly seek the mastery of all things, and in their never-ending tussle for the supremacy, first one, then the other seems to have gotten the victory. And one often wonders, as Ezekiel surely does now, which of these two forces, life or death, right or wrong, will actually, eventually win out. As he views this dismal scene he is profoundly moved. His thoughts are deep, his soul is troubled, he is despondent, overwhelmed. Is death lord? Is life impotent? Is wrong the victor, and right the vanquished?

Remember that this valley is not filled with bodies newly dead as of some recent field of battle,

but with bones; bare, withered, dry bones. They are not even skeletons from which vultures have picked clean the flesh, but an indiscriminate, disjointed, scattered mass of bones—*dry* bones, mind you! Bones which have no flesh on them, no marrow in them, no smallest atom of life about them. The rains from heaven have bleached them, the wintry winds and the summer sun have withered, whitened, dried them; they have no vestige of life. The ghostliness of this valley lies not in its “fresh horror of festering corruption,” but in its “gaunt squalor of dry ruin.” It is a scene altogether dismal, desolate, hopeless, revolting in the extreme—a valley full of unburied and dried-up bones!

Could there be anything more forlorn or unpromising than this? Think of it—a wide, beautiful, fruitful valley full of nothing but bones, white with the leprosy of death—death enthroned, secure, supreme, so far as human reason can tell. Round and round the prophet goes, over and through this grim valley of death. Bones, bones, bones: piles of them: stacks of them: nothing but bones, very many and very dry!

Ezekiel heard the divine voice in his heart saying, “Son of man, can these bones live?” and in his heart I think he must have quickly replied, “No!” How could they? He doubted, and yet faith constrained him to venture, “O Lord God, thou knowest.” His was the faith that brings

order out of chaos. "Ezekiel"—his very name means "God is strong."

## II

What is the meaning of this strange vision? How did the prophet come to have this experience?

Let us remember that he was now in captivity in Babylonia. In 597 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had captured Jerusalem and brought Judah under his rule. At that time he carried off to Babylon a great company of the flower of the land, the best sons of Jerusalem. Among them was Ezekiel, a young priest of insight and rare promise.

Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had now been in bondage to Assyria for nearly one hundred fifty years, a bondage from which they never returned. Ezekiel believed and predicted that Judah and Jerusalem would be destroyed, as Jeremiah in Jerusalem was then saying. He was right. In 586 Nebuchadnezzar utterly destroyed the capital, burned the Temple, and, amid horrors untold, carried off the whole Jewish people to Babylon. They were added to the other captive Jews taken in 597. Ezekiel had now been in Babylon ten years. The Jews were all settled in colonies in a wide and fruitful valley along the river Chebar. They had literally been "thrashed" by the invincible armies of Babylon. They were a bruised and broken people, uprooted from their land.



They had dared to hope to the bitter end that as a people they would not be destroyed, that as God's people they could not be. But they had been destroyed. Their all but deathless hope, their trusted theories, were mocked by the hideous, brutal facts that could no longer be denied, and they took it as the sure sign that God had cast them off. Either Jehovah was too weak to prevent their destruction, or He had not cared; He had forsaken them. That God had forsaken them finally, was evident, because He had permitted them to be taken out of the "Holy Land," and it to be overrun by the heathen.

They had never come to think of God as being anywhere but in Palestine. God was not in Babylon. Were the gods of Babylon stronger than Jehovah, their God? They felt forced to believe they were, since Babylon had conquered the chosen nation and destroyed Jehovah's Temple at Jerusalem. Their spirits drooped, their faith died, they settled in abject hopelessness. Their unbelief and despair seemed complete. God was defeated, His land polluted, His Temple burned, His people destroyed. By the canals and rivers of Babylon they languished. They gave themselves up to black despair. They went mourning all the day, refusing to be comforted. Their gloom was unmitigated, unrelieved.

Hear them as they tell of their grief, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we

wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion." Some of the Babylonians had come up to where they were sitting on the shady banks of the cooling stream and asked them to sing, perhaps tauntingly, one of their Temple songs, and play for them on their harps. But for harps they felt no need now; they had hung them upon the willows. And as for songs, these were frozen in their icy hearts. They replied to their captors out of angry and sorrowful hearts, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" They thought they could not worship Jehovah in Babylon. They thought they could not sing His songs except in the Temple at Jerusalem. God was not in Babylon, how could they worship and praise Him there?

But what a fine chance they missed to be missionaries! Why did they not tell these strangers of the true God? Ah, this is the chief reason why they were in exile now. They had not been faithful to God. They had come to think of Him as the God of the Jews only. They had associated Him with their land. They had yet to learn that God is the God of all men, and that He desires all men to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

It was now that Ezekiel was called to be a prophet unto the Exiles. He felt called to rebuke, instruct, and hearten them. He went about gathering them into groups and speaking to them. He went up and down among them day by day, year by year, for twenty-five years as their prophet and pastor, both warning and encouraging them.

His first sermons to them were messages of rebuke. He told them that their punishment was just; he said that God had forsaken them because they had forsaken Him. To be sure they were not inclined to listen to him, they were sunk in unbelief and despair. They were dead politically, morally, and spiritually. As the prophet worked with them and brooded over them he came to think of them as a valley of dry bones, lifeless and irresponsible.

This is the meaning, then, of the vision. "Behold they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off." Could they ever be lifted from this despair and deadness? Could they be brought again to cherish high hopes of themselves in the loving purpose of God? Ezekiel believed that they could. He dared to be a preacher of hope in despair. He set about to kindle new life in them. The Temple was gone, the nation was gone. There was nothing left but disconsolate individuals, and nothing but personal work for the prophet. With this preacher of the Exile personal evangelism was born.

In his teaching and preaching Ezekiel reminds us of Jeremiah, whom they had refused to heed. He takes up some of the great doctrines which that tragic man had stressed in the days just before the fall of the nation, and insists that they give heed to them now.

They were saying in effect, "We are paying for the sins of our fathers; we are suffering *now* for the sins which our nation has committed in the past." How quickly human nature imputes to others the blame for the mess our own folly has gotten us into. They were quoting with unction the proverb which was current in Israel then, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." This was true in a measure, but Ezekiel would have them see their own individual moral responsibility to God. God was punishing them for their own sins, he said, and not for the sins of others. He kept ringing in their ears, "The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die." This was a strange, new emphasis; it was never so taught in Israel before. How prone we are to charge up our faults to "inheritance" or to "environment," and not assume the blame for them ourselves directly.

The prophet would have them know that God was seeking them as a shepherd his lost sheep. Ezekiel was the first to assume the rôle of the Good Shepherd, the first man in the world to go among the lost sheep and win them one by one

back to God. He urged men to repent, promising the grace of God for individual heart repentance. Like Jeremiah, he told them their hearts were stony, that they must have new hearts before they could be the people of the Lord. "I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh: . . . and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

Amos and Hosea had spoken to the nation only. Jeremiah had spoken to the nation and to individuals. But there is no nation now. God will have a people, but it will no longer be a chosen nation; it will be a Church, composed of all who come to have the new heart indwelt by the Spirit of God. The prophet became a pastor of souls, an evangelist saying, "Return ye, and turn yourselves . . . and make you a new heart and a new spirit." If they would repent, the Lord's promise was, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: . . . a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, . . . and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." God's people are to be a new-heart people.

This is what might be. But would they "turn"? The truth is that they are as good as dead and in their graves. They were fast forgetting God. Many were satisfied to worship the gods of





THE PROPHETS JEREMIAH, JONAH, ISAIAH, AND HABAKKUK

*From the Frieze in the Boston Public Library*



Babylon. Many gave themselves up to making money, in which they soon excelled. (It was in the Exile that the Jew so sharpened his already keen instinct for money, as to be to this day the world's shrewdest money maker.)

Those who did not go into idolatry and irreligion were stolidly indifferent. They kept saying, "Our bones are dried, our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts." They were not alive with a newborn hope. They were to the prophet as a valley full of dry, disjointed, and lifeless bones. They were not merely the dried-up skeletons of a slain host; they had not even the coherence of skeletons, so that there seemed no promise or possibility of life. In that horrid valley he saw the bone of a leg here, a skull there; what had been arms here, what had been feet there. Israel was like that. Their religious and national bond was shattered. There was just as much unity and life in this multitude of dried-up bones as there was faith and spiritual life in captive Israel. "Son of man, can these bones live?" Can they? It would seem not. But gradually it was borne in upon the prophet that even this was not beyond the power of God, "O Lord God, thou knowest." He will hope in despair. Life feeds on death: hope flowers in hopelessness.

It was not wrong for the prophet to have this melancholy vision. It is not wrong for us to see and deplore the spiritual deadness all about us;

but to fix our eyes, and be content with it—that is unwarranted pessimism, inexcusable sin! If the divine voice in our hearts shall say concerning a church or individual whose light is darkness, “Can these bones live?” what will we say? Can this church, which has been torn by division and strife, into which a fatal lukewarmness has crept, over which spiritual death has settled as a cloud bank, be made to live again? And this man, who by unfortunate upbringing, bad example, and long continuance in sin, is morally dead—can he live anew? Can it be that these publicans, these harlots, these criminals, these indifferent, these self-righteous ones may one day stand redeemed in God’s Kingdom? “Can these bones live?” It does not look so, but “O Lord God, thou knowest.”

If Ezekiel saw the dry bones, he saw also the life-giving God. It is so easy to see the disease and fail to see the Remedy or credit the Physician. Ezekiel did not acquiesce in the dark, disconcerting fact; he faced it manfully. God could have raised these bones to life, but he told the prophet to do something about them. He did not tell Ezekiel to raise them, but to prophesy. “Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.” God must work, if at all, through human lives. *We pray, we live, we preach, but God does the work.*

God told the prophet that these bones should

live again; that *He* would cause muscle and flesh to come upon them; that He would cover them with skin; that He would breathe into them and make them live. "Breath" here means "spirit," the converting Spirit of God. All the winds of heaven are needed to animate this army of the dead, "these slain ones." The same quickening spirit that gives new life to the dead in sin, they must have. Ezekiel has the resurrection faith in the God of resurrection. God's "breath" must give them a new birth.

### III

We shall presently see a new changed valley. The prophet did what he was told: he prophesied, and there was first a noise, then a shaking, then a sight wondrous to behold. This entire valley of disconnected, scattered bones started gliding together, bone to his bone, piece to its piece, part to its part. There they were, a vast army of skeletons, prone and stark and frightful. Then as the prophet gazed he saw the pale flesh creep upon them; saw the skin cover them, but there was no breath in them. It was now a colossal congregation of lifeless bodies. It was as if the tombs of Egypt had suddenly been uncovered and their multitudes of lifeless, well-preserved mummies left bare to sight. Is this life: is it death? But he is told to prophesy to the wind and say, "Come, O breath, and breathe upon these slain,



that they may live." So he prophesied, "And the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

Thus Ezekiel saw that Israel, broken, scattered, dead and left a "veritable valley of death," could be and would be yet restored. God would cause them to come up out of their graves, they should be planted in their land again, the people of the Lord. Ezekiel had been bound to see and foretell the ruin of all that was dear to him, but though the chosen nation is destroyed, the real Israel will not perish. A faithful remnant will remain; upon these Jehovah will pour out his spirit. He will make them a new covenant which cannot be broken. It was unthinkable that the nation should remain in exile. Wrong cannot triumph for long, God cannot be defeated, He will have a new people with a new heart.

#### IV

This vision of the valley of dry bones may teach us some things now that it was not at first intended to teach. Though intended to symbolize the restoration of Israel from exile, like so much of the Old Testament, it is capable of a wide and Christian application.

1. We may see here a picture of race-wide depravity and the universal need of Divine help for man if he is to be saved. Human nature is depraved—let us not scruple to say it—totally

depraved—vitiating, hampered, turned aside, fallen, and altogether without power to lift itself. It must be lifted by Another. Sin has not only dimmed the spiritual vision of man, but it has left him dead. The breath of God must be breathed into him if he is ever to live. It matters little whether the story of Eden be literally true or regarded as a parable true to life, the picture of sin there sketched is the eternally true one. We may not be able to explain it. It is far easier to recognize the fact of it. I do not know if

In Adam's fall  
We sinned all.

What I do know is that all have sinned, do sin, and are in need of help beyond ourselves. I may not be able to see how that "by one man's sin all were made sinners," how that by the fall of one, all fell; what I am certain of, however, is, that all are sinners, all are down, and must be lifted by a Power not our own. Let us let the old phrase, "total depravity," stand. Sin has wounded us all. It has left humanity a valley of dry bones, broken, helpless, dead. The Bible teaches it, history attests it, experience proves it, let us face it—sin, my sin and yours, is a solemn fact. There is no getting around that. Then come, "O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live!"

2. We may see also in this strange vision other

lessons. Here are pictures of religious realities in our lives today. There is among us a multitude of spiritual wrecks. Some are sunk in the valley of covetousness, millions have fallen victims in the big broad valley of organized selfishness. There is the valley of spiritual dry-rot within the organized Church—myriads have fallen in this valley, many who

diet still on mud  
And splash the altars with it.

Then there are in the souls of multitudes today fragments of wrecked faith, stray traces of what was once a life of religion in the Church. Everywhere one comes upon these dried-up relics of a former life. There is much unbelief among us. There is much of arid Christianity—Christianity that is dry, dismembered, lifeless, void of warm enthusiasm, vision, and unity.

Such was the world Christ came to save—a valley of shattered souls, disjointed, perplexed, sinning. As Paul puts it in the first chapter of Romans, a world “filled with all unrighteousness.” Can these bones live? Can the dry bones in our modern valleys be raised to life? They can if we “prophesy.” Ezekiel prophesied, and the whole valley of bones rose up to life. John Wesley prophesied, and the Methodist Church was born. William Carey prophesied, and the modern missionary enterprise sprang into being. The preacher prophesies in his pulpit from Sunday to

Sunday, and here and there one rises up to walk in newness of life.

A great valley of bones confronting the Church today is the mission field. The missionary goes into one of these most unpromising fields. Sometimes it looks hopeless. Will they hear and heed the gospel? Can these bones be made to live? We know that they can; that they do. Let us take a single illustration from many. When James Calvert entered the Fiji Islands with the Gospel in 1835 there was not a single Christian in all the 117,000 population. At that time the Fijis had no equal for brutality, vice, and degradation of every kind. Their sick and aged were killed off and gotten out of the way. Widows were never allowed to outlive their husbands. Cannibalism was everywhere the custom. "The man who had eaten the greatest number of human beings was highest in the social order."

But in 1845 a revival of religion broke out and swept the Islands. The message of Christ and the cross ran until by 1886 there was not an avowed heathen in the land. The whole population went to church. "Son of man, can these bones live?" The answer is an unqualified, "Yes!"

Ezekiel's vision was grandly fulfilled. He did not live to see it, but his people were literally restored to their land in the next century. The Temple was rebuilt, Jerusalem was restored, but

not the king or nation as before. They were henceforth a spiritual people, a Church, rather than a chosen nation. But the highest reaches of his vision awaited the coming of Christ for its fulfilment.

In exile the Hebrews had learned much. They had learned that God was not confined to their land, but was omnipresent. They had learned to pray to Him, to worship Him where there was no Temple. They had to see the Temple destroyed before they saw that the best of all shrines was the human heart, and the place where God best loved to dwell. They had learned that sin was individual and that religion must be, too. They had learned to revere the Sabbath. The best of them learned that God loved all men. In fact, they had been made ready for an advanced step in religion, which came in all its fulness and beauty with the coming and death of Christ the Lord.

Breathe on *us*, Breath of God,  
Fill *us* with life anew,  
That *we* may love what thou dost love,  
And do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on *us*, Breath of God,  
So shall *we* never die,  
But live with thee the perfect life  
Of thine eternity.



## CHAPTER IX

### NEHEMIAH: THE PATRIOTIC LEADER

And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?—Nehemiah 6:3.

I know of no greater example of balanced and genuine patriotism than that of Nehemiah, the child of the Jewish captivity in Babylonia. Nehemiah was born in bondage and exile far from the shores of his native land. Like the vast majority of his race, he was industrious and progressive. And when we are introduced to his history, we find him at Shushan, the palace of the king of Persia, serving as chief cupbearer to the king. This was a responsible position to hold in the ancient East, for the cupbearer must always taste the wine before handing it to the king, as a proof that it was free from poison. Therefore, as cupbearer to his sovereign, Nehemiah was his closest companion and chief counselor.

For one hundred fifty years the Jews had been away from their homeland; but almost a century before this a small colony had been given permission by King Cyrus to return. They had returned, but their efforts to restore their capital and nation

had utterly failed. Ignoble failure was written large over all that they had tried to do. Nehemiah had been thinking of these things a good deal. He kept hearing bad news concerning the Jerusalem Jews. He pondered these things in his heart. Meantime the yearning fires of patriotism blazed in his soul.

Now one day there came to Nehemiah at Shushan his brother, Hanani, direct from Jerusalem. Nehemiah quickly made inquiry into the state of conditions there and was told things which made him very sad. His brother told him the true but disheartening story of things just as they were. The people were in great affliction and reproach, he said. The walls of Jerusalem had been broken down, and her gates burned to ashes. The people were in the midst of many foes without any protection whatever. Every night many were robbed, and some were killed; so, that in the morning their dead and mangled bodies lay stark and prone in the streets of the city. Moreover, the tombs of the fathers were in ruins. All this was a deep humiliation and disgrace to the Jews, and the shame and bitterness of it entered like a dagger into the soul of Nehemiah. A nameless sadness settled over his spirit. Day by day as he went about his duties he was thinking, thinking, thinking. And as he prodded this sad state of affairs in the homeland, the fires of religious patriotism burned in his

breast. He wore a troubled look which, try as he might, he could not hide.

Now an Eastern cupbearer was supposed to be cheerful. He was expected to radiate happiness and sunshine, but Nehemiah was sad and dejected, and he could not hide it. He was not sick, but heartsick. His accustomed blitheness was gone. Then the monarch, seeing his depressed condition, bade him make his trouble known. This was Nehemiah's test. If he has any real courage, any true patriotism, he will show it now. He is about to put in a plea for his people; but is not the city and the people concerning which he is to make request under the displeasure of his king? Are not these Jews his subjects, his bondsmen? And had he not suppressed their earlier attempts to reëstablish Jerusalem and revive the nation? Small wonder, then, that Nehemiah was "very sore afraid"! Would not such a request kindle the wrath of the king against him? But he instantly lifted his heart to "the God of heaven" in a quick ejaculation of prayer and made the daring request. He asked permission to leave, for a time, the service of the king, that he might go to Jerusalem and rebuild her thrown-down walls, and be the protector and defender of his afflicted people in the spoiled fatherland. A heroic proposal indeed.

The dictionary defines patriotism as "the passion inspiring one to serve one's country";

and a patriot as, "one who loves his country and zealously supports its authority and interests." Genuine patriotism loves the very soul of the fatherland, but if it be true patriotism, it lifts one out of petty personal concerns. It led Nehemiah to abandon his high position, give up his good salary, face great hazards, and make great sacrifices to serve his brother men. True patriotism is close kin to religion.

Notice that the patriotism of Nehemiah revealed itself, first, in warm sympathy for his suffering people, but in the next instance, it revealed itself in prayer. True patriotism is inspired of God, and no godless or irreligious man can be a patriot in the best sense. The next thing that this true patriot did was to confess his sins before God. Now surely if much that passes for patriotism today were cleansed and tempered by the confession of personal and national sins, hatred of the "enemy" into which patriotism tends to run, would be greatly diminished.

Nehemiah's sentiments were profoundly stirred, but he did not stop with good sentiments. He felt the challenge of a great task; but before he accepted the challenge, he put behind it thought, prayer, preparation, and then under its thrill went out to work believing in the worthiness of the enterprise and in his ability to carry it through. Nehemiah never forgot that he was "doing a great work." It was this that made him successful.

Now the challenge of a great work does many things for one.

## I

*It makes one willing to sacrifice.* Nehemiah gave up a conspicuous position, a position which brought him honor, eminence, and large remuneration, in order to cross fifteen hundred miles of desert and undertake a work which others had completely failed to accomplish. Surely this would prove a most difficult and discouraging task. Even if the king should grant his request (as he did), there would be stubborn, puzzling problems to the end. There were perils to face in the way up to the homeland. Many would oppose before he could even arrive at Jerusalem, and great would be the opposition to his work once he was there. There would be paralyzing and stupid indifference from within and vigorous and spiteful and determined opposition from without. All this he foresaw, but the challenge of a great, good work made him heedless of dangers and bore him cheerfully, steadfastly on. He felt that he was engaged in a work which pleased God, and such a feeling made drudgery divine. And if we could live and work with such a conviction, how much more we might do to rebuild the world's broken-down walls! "I am doing a great work," he said, and kept right on at it. With such purposed fidelity as that possessed by Nehemiah, how we might reconstruct the toppled



walls of human spirits and of Christian experiences on every side of us!

## II

And such a challenge *gives one courage*. Nehemiah had dauntless courage. He had to have. It took courage to propose to King Artaxerxes what he wished to do at Jerusalem. It took courage to make the perilous journey. It took great courage to meet the lethargy of the Jews in the land, already disheartened by suffering and wretched failure. It took courage to face the malicious opposition of their enemies there. It took courage to launch the work and courage to carry it on once it was under way. From beginning to end Nehemiah in all this work had to be dominated by dauntless courage. It has been said that the reason why the lions did not eat Daniel was because he was mostly backbone and the rest grit. This was just as true of Nehemiah as he fought with "beasts," not of Ephesus, but of Samaria and Jerusalem. He was possessed of "grit." This man had no half-baked ideas; he took no halting steps. To doubt would be failure, but to hope and dare, success. And we who have the task of rebuilding broken hearts and spirits and lives must be possessed of a rare sort of courage and consecration. We must be able to say with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work," and with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the

gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation."

Such a man as Nehemiah turns all his trials into triumphs, and his vexations into victories. This sort of courage steels one against opposition and makes one impervious even to ridicule, for when Sanballat and the Samaritans mocked him, it moved him not—except to prayer. When the work on the wall made but slow progress, Tobiah the Ammonite cast ridicule on Nehemiah and his work, saying, "If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." "Talk about securing the city and keeping our army out," said this scoffer, "why, any wall which these weak Jews may build will be so fragile, so unsubstantial, that if one of the foxes which live in the débris of Jerusalem's ruins, should leap upon it, it would fall down." But none of these things moved Nehemiah.

These cynical, scoffing opposers now ceased to ridicule and resorted to treachery. Sanballat and his party sent to him, saying, "Come, let us meet in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." This was about twenty miles north of Jerusalem; they could safely murder him there in the desert. But he suspected that they thought to do him mischief, and answered, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease whilst I leave it, and come down unto you?" He has no time to parley with those who

would only impede his work. He would give temptation no such advantage. He would keep constantly occupied and so cut the nerve of temptation.

### III

Then, such a challenge *leads one to make ample preparation*. Nehemiah did not begin his great task of restoring Jerusalem's ruined wall, or rebuilding the wasted nation, until he had made a complete survey of the situation and had all the facts and factors in hand. See him on that midnight ride going round about the defenseless city. See him as he marks well all there is to be done—getting into the situation and letting the situation get into him—all the while wisely keeping his own counsel. What a noble figure he presents on horseback against the midnight sky! How he grips the imagination.

Like Paul Revere on another midnight ride made in the name of freedom, of country, and of God, he kept lonely vigil throughout the night watches until the dawning of the day! He followed the entire course of the wall, walking where he could not ride for the débris. He started at the Valley Gate in the Valley of Hinnom, went on to the Fountain Gate in the Kidron Valley, where he could see Solomon's majestic Temple now in heaps, then he came round to the Sheep Gate on the north, then followed the western wall to the

Water Gate on the east of the city, then back to where he had started, at the Valley Gate on the south. He has gone round the city now. While the rest of the world slept and slumbered, this man of industry and courage was "toiling upward in the night." And this he is doing not for himself either, but for others and for God.

## IV

The vision of a finished work such as Nehemiah had *shows one the need of coöperation* if it is to be achieved. He did not say, "This is a one-man job, this is my task, *I* have been appointed governor of Judah, *I* will build again the wall of Jerusalem." This would have been foolish and futile. No, instead he said, "Let *us* rise up and build." No leader, however able, can execute a great task alone. May every one of us hear anew this ringing challenge: "Let *us* rise up and build"—build happier hearts, nobler characters, better lives, a better Church, a better community, better Christian hopes, better homes, a better country.

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,  
As the swift seasons roll!  
Leave thy low-vaulted past!  
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,  
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,  
Till thou at length art free,  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.

## V

The challenge of a great task *saves one from temptation*. There is the temptation to spend our lives in mediocre ways, the tendency to live for mediocre things. But the challenge of a good work saves one from being governed by trivial or mediocre motives.

One of the first things the foes of Nehemiah did was to cast ridicule at him and his work. The cynical Sanballat said, "What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? . . . will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" And Tobiah said, "A fox could knock over their wall."

But ridicule could not stop Nehemiah. He went on, saying, "I am doing a great work, I cannot stop." This man has set himself a task and he will finish it; nothing shall deter him. He is sustained by the dream of a finished work.

When all these evil tactics miscarried and they saw the wall slowly coming to completion, they gathered an army to come against the Jews. This greatly discouraged many of the workers, and ten times, from all quarters, they came to Nehemiah saying, "They will be upon us soon." But brave and resourceful Nehemiah turned half of his men into an army which stood ready to defend the work while the rest kept on working. Once more their best laid schemes were frustrated



and the work went steadily on. And again I hear Nehemiah say, "I am doing a great work, should I not fight to maintain it?" and once more he breathed forth prayer and thanksgiving to God. Prayer and precaution, faith and works will do the impossible.

Now when almost every design of the enemy failed they tried that most cruel and wicked of all the dark arts of the wicked—*slander*. They sought to set Nehemiah in a bad light before the king of Persia. They said he was fomenting a rebellion against the Persian ruler, that he was in the way to becoming a king himself. They whispered to the Jews that he was fattening his own purse from their labor. But this did not work, for the people well knew that their governor served them without pay, and their malignant designs were once more foiled.

But Nehemiah's foes were determined in their efforts to undo his work. As a last resort they tried conspiracy. They induced a false prophet to go to him and say that it was the Lord's will for him to shut himself up in the Temple lest they capture and kill him. This was insidious, for no layman was allowed to enter the Temple, and if he had gone in he would have violated the ritual laws. This would have ruined him with the people.

Nehemiah knew that hypocrisy often lurks in pious words. He would not go in, but said,

"For this cause was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me." And again he prayed one of his brief but passionate and potent prayers, "Remember, O my God." He saw that treachery lurked in these honeyed words of the false prophet, and he "had too much courage to flee and too much conscience to violate the sanctity of the house of God."

It is so easy to drift back, to sink;  
So hard to live abreast of what you think.

It takes great strength to live where you belong  
When other people think that you are wrong;  
People you love, and who love you, and whose  
Approval is a pleasure you would choose.  
To bear this pressure and succeed at length  
In living your belief—well, it takes strength.

## VI

Finally, the challenge of a great work is *necessary for great achievement*. It was a huge undertaking to restore the wall and the city of Jerusalem, but Nehemiah did not stop until the work was finished. Nor did he cease with the restoration of the city; he rebuilt the nation also. Then, too, he reformed their civic and religious life which had become vitiated; he cleansed their worship and purified their morals which had sadly fallen into decay. When he came he found that Jews were oppressing brother Jews, taxes were exorbitant, ethics were bad, and that ancient evil, the

oppression of the poor by the rich and strong, was appallingly prevalent. All this Nehemiah changed.

The sterling thing about Nehemiah's life which none should miss, was his abiding consciousness of being ever engaged in a great and worthy work. This made him a true servant of God and a patient and patriotic leader of men. Time and time again when tempted to slacken his pace and cease his difficult task, he would say, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

Nehemiah lived five hundred years before Christ, but he was a great patriot. Had he lived this side the cross he would have been greater and better. The love he manifested toward his race and people in their need, we should have for all men of all races. His last words were, "Remember me, O my God, for good." Heaven give us more praying patriots! Here was a devoted man, a patriotic leader, a praying statesman, and in the words of Browning

One who never turned his back but marched breast  
forward,

Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong  
would triumph.

## CHAPTER X

### JOB: THE MAN WHO BROUGHT TRIAL TO GOD

Wherefore do the wicked live,  
Become old, yea, wax mighty in power?—Job  
21:7. R. V.

It is all the same; He destroys the innocent and the  
guilty alike.—Job 9:22. McFadyen's translation.

These words were wrung from the soul of Job in the furnace of pain. They remind us sharply of the words of Jeremiah, Israel's chiefest and most tragic prophet, when in the midst of spiritual anguish and mental perplexity he cried, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" Very unwillingly Jeremiah, commissioned by God, had undertaken the thankless and repugnant task of being prophet in Israel at a time when prophets were least wanted. He went forth with Jehovah's message only to be treated with hot scorn and cool contempt. He was constantly the victim of sinister designs and rough treatment. At length weary in body and sick at heart he complained, "Why is God so patient with the wicked? Why has He called me to do His work and then allowed me to fail miserably in the accomplishment of that work? Why does God suffer Himself to be

mocked, and His purposes thwarted by evil designs and doings of evil men?" He saw the right crushed on every hand, while wickedness everywhere thrived. So far as he could see it was

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne.

It was quite human, then, for the sensitive prophet to ask, "Why do the righteous suffer, while the wicked go scot-free; why doth the way of the wicked prosper?" This tragic prophet tried hard to believe the best about God. He said, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, in all thy judgments; but, God, I can't make head or tail of them." This was the case with Job in like circumstances.

It had long been an axiom of Hebrew faith that God punished the wicked and prospered the good. This was almost the central article of Jewish creed. It was a vital part of the theology of the Hebrews. They believed it firmly; they banked on it confidently.

In the early days of his ministry, Jeremiah had preached during the reign of the good King Josiah. He had seen his reverence and zeal for God; had witnessed his timely reforms; had rejoiced in his righteous deeds. But it soon happened that Necho, king of Egypt, came to conquer Israel; and King Josiah in the name of the Lord went out to meet him and defend his country. They met in Megiddo's bloody field,



and the good Josiah went down. They hauled the good man back to Jerusalem in his chariot all covered with blood, and dead. It was a fearful blow. The people were wild; Jerusalem was raging; why had God allowed it? The soul of the prophet was troubled and he groaned, "Why, why, why doth the way of the wicked prosper?"

Now this was the problem of Job. All about him he saw right trampled in the dirt, while wrong went unimpeded. He saw the good man poverty-stricken and sick, while the blasphemer was healthy, happy, and prosperous. He wants to know why it is that the good suffer and the bad have good success, if God is just. It was very comforting to believe that God, without fail, blessed the good and penalized the bad according to their deserts here and now, *if it were so*. The only difficulty Job saw about the attractive and time-honored tenet was that it was not true. The ugly facts of life gave it the lie. He was forced to revise his cherished theory to make it fit the facts. Human life was full of injustice and inequalities. He saw what he thought was huge mismanagement in God's government of the world. He wanted to make his complaint to the face of the Almighty. He grew skeptical and bitter toward God, came to think of Him as a pitiless monster, and finally went so far as to say bluntly, "It is all the same; He destroys the innocent and the guilty alike. 'It is the tents

of robbers that prosper, and they that provoke God that are secure.' Things are not fair, and God does not seem to care."

### A Tragic Story

What was it that set Job thinking thoughts like these?

It was, as you recall, a series of tragic misfortunes which overtook him. Job was a mighty man of the East, an upright, God-fearing man. And because of his high character and integrity God had greatly blessed him. He was very rich, rich in sons and daughters, in flocks and herds, in friends and a model home. He was not only wealthy and good, but he was a man of wisdom, too. In all the ways that count we are told "he was the greatest of all the children of the East."

But a swift storm of disaster overtakes him. In one fell stroke he is deprived of all his wealth. In another his seven sons and three daughters are the victims of a sudden calamity and all of them are brought home dead. Last and worst of all, Job himself is terribly afflicted with leprosy. His body is covered from head to foot with offensive, ulcerating boils, every one of which is a running, stinging sore, which itch and burn and irritate the livelong day. He is suddenly "skinned" of all his possessions, of all that makes life worth the living, and will be fortunate indeed if he escapes with his skin.

There he sits, just outside the village gate, on the ash heap scraping himself with a piece of a broken jar to ease the frightful torment. For a time he is in such agony of body and agitation of spirit that he is dumb. For days neither he nor his friends can utter a word, so terrible is his condition. In the presence of such grief what can sympathy do but be silent? What can men do but be dumb? But at length Job opens his mouth and curses the unfortunate day on which he was born, and prays that he may be blotted out of existence. In a single hour he has been reduced from wealth to beggary. In one cruel blow hard upon another he has been bereaved of his children, smitten with a loathsome disease, and tempted by his wife to renounce God and have done with life. Yet in all this he had been most patient and self-possessed. But as he thought deeper upon life and its problems, as fierce, shooting pain tortured his frame, he grew rebellious in spirit and moaned like a perplexed soul of a later day:

I know not why the evil seems  
Supreme on every hand:  
Why suffering flows in endless streams  
I do not understand.

### A Burning Question

Job puts again his burning question. In bitterness and revolt he is asking, "Is God just? and if He is, why do the wicked prosper while

the innocent and the good suffer?" The mystery of sin baffles him, the problem of pain overwhelms him. He wants to know why the scamps succeed and the saints fail; why the innocent are plagued and the guilty are blessed? The thing that perplexes and vexes him is not so much the fact that he suffers, but that he suffers *unjustly*. If the old idea that suffering is always the result of sin, and prosperity ever the reward of goodness, be true, why is he suffering? He has not been sinful, but righteous. Job could say, and none could gainsay, "I was a father to the poor; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." All his life he had been the friend of the widow and the poor. He had been a father to the orphans. He had shielded the weak against the strong. He had served God with a perfect heart. That he had lived a blameless life, "God-fearing and turning away from evil," none dared question. He was so devout that he offered sacrifices for his children even before he was conscious of any sin in them. He would take no chances on offending Jehovah, but offered extra sacrifices saying, "Perhaps my sons have sinned."

Satan had brought the charge that Job was pious because it paid to be pious. Who would not be virtuous when virtue paid so well? He said that God had hedged him off from adversity. Trouble could not get at him. He argues that to

spoil Job's happiness would spoil his piety. "Destroy his prosperity and you will destroy his religion," said Satan. He was right in saying that the true test of Job's religion would come only when his blessings were withdrawn. This is just as true with us today as with Job then. Is his piety real? Is his faith robust? Is his devotion to God genuine? Is his eye single? Are his motives mixed? This will be clearly seen the moment he has nothing left but God. Take away his wealth, his health, his family, his friends, and will he love God still? "Strip him of what he *has*, and then we shall see what he *is*." This old cynic is saying, "Every man has his price, the price for which he will sell all." But Job did not have his price. He had lost his wealth, his children, his health; all his friends were only "miserable comforters," his wife was a fool—he trod the winepress of his anguish and undeserved suffering unbefriended, misunderstood and alone. But like the poet Henley in the "Invictus," his head though bloody was unbowed. He too could have said:

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.



Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how straight the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.<sup>1</sup>

Satan, who challenges Job's easy religion and questions the integrity of his heart, is permitted to see him put to trial. Without any warning Job is rushed into a perfect maelstrom of awful calamity, and suffers losses which he did not merit, yet he remained loyal to God.

But Satan was not yet beaten. He argued that so far Job had only lost what he *had*. The man himself had not been scratched, he said. Afflict his person and see what becomes of his piety. It is only a man whose faith is real, whose religion is genuine, who can suffer deeply and not lose his faith in God. If his faith be weak or his religion superficial it will break under the test of adversity. So contends the tempter, and we shudder lest his claims be true. Let us see. One misfortune after another overtakes Job until he is a stripped and ruined man. Not only is he bereft of family, property, friends, and health; he is misunderstood, scorned, slandered—and that by his friends and old associates. There he sits in the ashes, forsaken by man and plagued

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<sup>1</sup>The Charles Scribner's Sons, publishers. Used by permission.

by God, but still he holds unswervingly to his faith in God! He has complained, and questioned the veracity of God, but not yet repudiated Him.

But his misery is becoming more and more unbearable. At length amid intolerable agony of body and soul he complains of the injustice of it. Then his old friends come round him. They have been nourished in the "creed outworn." One says Job is a good man to be sure, but there is some sin for which he is being punished, for God does not plague the innocent. These were the words of Eliphaz and they stung Job into furious revolt. Sure of his own innocence, he declares that the God who smites and curses such as he must Himself be unrighteous. "If God thus afflicts the innocent, then it is God who is bad, not me," says Job. In his bewilderment he asserts that God is not just, and that he should like to come face to face with Him and plead his cause before Him. He says God has set him up as a target and is shooting His arrows at him. The poison arrows of the Almighty are whistling about him thick and fast; he wishes God would quit sporting with him, quit keeping him in suspense, let one of His arrows hit His mark and end all for him.

Then Bildad and Zopher, two more of Job's learned friends, speak up and say that God rewards the good with good and the bad with evil, and exhort him to repent (since he must

have sinned), and return to God. They say that God is swift to punish evil in this world, and go on to hint strongly that this is why Job suffers—God is punishing the evil in him.

It was the same old contention. At this Job's patience gave way. He flew into a rage and bitterly scorned these preacher-philosophers. He blistered them with scorching sarcasm, pelted them with heavy verbal blows saying, "No doubt ye are *the* people, and wisdom shall die with you." He accused them of spinning webs of lies against him. They are all logic choppers more interested in theories and theology than truth. They care more for creed than for men; Job cares for nothing but truth. They have their cherished theories, but Job has his profound experiences. A warmth within his breast had melted

The freezing reason's colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart  
Stood up and answer'd, "I have felt."

Their faith had never been tested by trial; his was being strained to the breaking point by the galling facts.

But still he persisted in doubting the goodness of God and the equity of His rule in the world. He dismissed his friends as "miserable comforters," and said, "If I could but get God down here from His sealed-up heaven I would put my case up to Him and He would vindicate me." But he said God would not come down to him; indeed,

if there be a God he could not find Him. Job's skepticism has struck bottom. He has reached man's extremity. Now is God's opportunity.

Then his faith took a turn and soared again. He declared his Vindicator was alive, and though he could not find Him then, yet sometime, somewhere he would vindicate him; if not in this world, then in the next. His hope of immortality had not been strong, but light was breaking through, he was forced to believe that somewhere beyond this life there is a place where truth and goodness will be vindicated. His faith in a bright and just hereafter bounded forth.

Job's groping faith had mounted to the heights, but it could not stay in the heights for long. His body writhed in the ashes; his spirit must come down too. It is hard to fix one's faith in the sky when one's body is in the mud. So, quite true to life, his spirit descends to the depths. His doubts come back with a strong rebound, and again he murmurs, "It is all the same; He destroys the innocent and the guilty alike."

Sin! Suffering! Injustice! Why? why? Oh, how this tough problem has vexed the minds of reflective and sensitive souls in all ages! It drove David to the edge of despair when he saw "the ungodly flourish as the green bay tree," while the ills and distresses of the godly were many. So often the best of this world receive the worst at its hands. Jeremiah, Job, David—did they not

know? In Jerusalem where they lived, both the weeping prophet and the poet-king had seen it too often. Here on one side of the street, let us say, is a vicious man. He oppresses his neighbor, steals the virtue of women, hates religion, and flouts God; and yet everything he puts his hand to turns to gold. He has plenty of friends, all the comforts of life, and is happy. And on that same street in Jerusalem, it may be, there lives a saintly character who honors God and loves his fellows, is upright, but is poor. He toils long and hard to clothe and feed his wife and children, and then can just keep the wolf from the door. One day his wife dies, leaving him with five little children to care for—one of them an infant in arms. Then the baby itself dies. Then his oldest little girl goes, and then another, and another, until his home is left a blank tragedy. How these things disturbed men then! How they disturb us now! Cannot God prevent them? Yes; then why doesn't He? "Why, why?" we ask.

This world order seems not only utterly indifferent, but "Nature, red in tooth and claw" is no respecter of persons.

Void of emotion  
Nature's dead bosom.  
Shineth the sunlight  
On sinner and saint:  
On deed that is nameless  
On blood of the hero  
Gleams the blind glory  
Of moonshine and stars.



The mystery of lives broken by ill-health is another aspect of Job's problem and of ours. Here is the sad spectacle of a dear friend possessed of rare gifts and graces compelled to languish through weary years of suffering; and we are prone sometimes to ask a resentful "Why?" The pathway of the world is thickly strewn with broken purposes: children dying in infancy—"little blossoms of promise that never come to fruit: why were they born for just a week or two of pain? Or young men in the bloom of manhood, full of enthusiasm and dreams, suddenly cut short by death: loose gossamer threads of broken purpose, floating idly on the mocking winds, they seem to our blinded eyes." By these things we are smitten to our knees in the dust, yet in dumb wonderment

The heavens above make no disclosure,  
The earth keeps up its terrible composure.

It was these heartbreaking enigmas of life that called forth the "cursing psalms." They were passionate appeals to God for vengeance upon the brutalities of brutal men. Men longed for the day when the righteous should wash their feet in the blood of the wicked. It was this apparent indifference of the Almighty to earth's frightful injustices that made the scoffer of Zephaniah's day say, "Jehovah does neither good nor evil." He is indifferent. He simply leaves the world to take its course. It was this that

made Habakkuk scold God as he witnessed the brutalities of Israel's foes. It looked to this prophet as if God were asleep, and he cried, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" It seemed to him that those who ignored or defied God succeeded best of all, while those who loved and served Him were too often doomed to sorrow and trouble. He would not run the world thus.

A broken-hearted prophet in the days of Malachi wistfully enquired, "Where is the God of justice?" Moses goes to his unknown grave with his hopes frustrated and his dreams of entering the land of promise unfulfilled. Josiah, the good, while in the defense of the right against the wrong, is taken up from the field dead. I had a schoolmate just graduated after years of sacrifice and preparation, who, just one week before he was to have sailed to spend his life for Christ in darkest Africa, was killed instantly by an elevator. All that preparation and consecration gone for nothing apparently.

Such problems staggered the mind of Job. They puzzle us still. Why is it that those who would not harm a living creature, or give pain to any soul, go bowed for years in painful suffering?

Why is that Christian mother taken from her babe which she would bring up to love God and bless the world? Why is that brightest, most promising daughter of the home selected and called by Death when in the bloom of womanhood at the morning time of life? Why is the consecrated missionary on the field taken with an incurable disease and forever prevented from telling the good news of Christ to those who are in such dire need of it? Why is it that in a single hour earthquakes, tornadoes, and floods desolate hundreds of homes and leave multitudes in undeserved destitution and death? Why? Why? But the mute universe yields us no answer. The heavens are silent. See that group of philosophers gathered about Job's ash heap, cracking their brains while he breaks his heart over the riddles of life. But philosophy cannot answer these questions. The solution is not to be found here below, but above; not in some sin of Job, but in some hidden purpose of God. The plowshare of God had entered the soul of this good man.

The dark brown mold's upturned  
By the sharp-pointed plow—  
And I've a lesson learned.

My life is but a field,  
Stretched out beneath God's sky  
Some harvest rich to yield.

Where grows the golden grain?  
Where faith? where sympathy?  
*In a furrow cut by pain.*

### The Answer of Faith

The last speaker to address Job was Elihu. He came near the truth when he said that Job's suffering was a loving discipline from God.

But Job's moaning is soon to be quieted; his question is to receive an answer. God answers Job by asking him some humbling questions. He said, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Do you know the law of heaven? Have you entered into the storehouses of the snow? Are you familiar with the paths of the light and the wind? Who governs the fork-tailed lightning and the torrential rains? Can you make the dew, the hoarfrost, or the ice that incases the stream? Did you give the snorting horse his might? Who made the shimmering sea and the mighty leviathan who goes therein? Who holds the mysteries of life and death and of the universe in His hands?" God told Job that he could not comprehend, much less create or govern, any part of the universe, and that he should not complain of His government of it.

Then Job, seeing his insignificance and presumption said:

Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee?  
I lay mine hand upon my mouth.  
Once have I spoken; and I will not answer;  
Yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.

. . . . .

Then Job answered the Lord, and said,  
I know that thou canst do all things,  
And that no purpose of thine can be restrained.  
Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge?  
Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not.

. . . . .  
I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;  
But now mine eye seeth thee,  
Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent  
In dust and ashes.

He had learned that our vision here is of necessity short. We cannot tell how the story will end, for we read it in serial form. But one day the mist will be banished by the Light, and we shall *see* and *know*.

It was the vision of God which had brought Job peace and release. Pain and suffering and sin are as mysterious as ever, but God as the loving Father has come and Job's problem is gone. God is the only solution of the world's baffling riddles. To know God and His love is to be made content to suffer without knowing or caring to know the reason why. We can bear sorrow if we know that the loving God permits it. Job was satisfied at last. Like the hero of Tennyson's immortal poem:

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,  
At last he beat his music out;  
There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.



He fought his doubts and gathered strength,  
He would not make his judgment blind,  
He faced the specters of the mind  
And laid them; thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own,  
And Power was with him in the night,  
Which makes the darkness and the light,  
And dwells not in the light alone.

## CHAPTER XI

### JONAH: THE MAN WHO DID NOT LOVE FOREIGNERS

And the Lord said, . . . should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?—Jonah 4:10. 110 R. V.

A great Bible scholar of our time has said, "I have read the book of Jonah at least a hundred times, and I will publicly avow that I cannot even now take up that marvelous book, nay, nor even speak of it, without the tears rushing to my eyes, and my heart beating higher. This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that ever was written, and I should like to say to everyone who approaches it, 'Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground'."¹

Another noted Bible scholar of our day has said, "It is little less than a tragedy that to most people the book of Jonah is chiefly known for its connection with a great fish. Anyone who takes the trouble to read it—and it is one of the shortest of books—will see what an insignificant part the fish plays in the story; and if the two verses

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¹ Cornill.

which contain references to it were cut out, the great lesson of the book would be affected in no way whatever; for its lesson is that the love of God is not confined to any one nation, but stretches over all the world, embracing nations which, it may be, our own nation hates. The book is the everlasting rebuke to all small patriotisms, a touching appeal for world-wide citizenship, and a clarion call to the extension of the foreign missionary enterprise and to the fervent proclamation of the immeasurable love of God for all men.”<sup>1</sup>

The prophet Jonah lived in the days of Jeroboam II, the great king of Israel, and was, it seems, that king’s court preacher or chaplain. But Bible scholars generally hold that the book of Jonah was written much later than the time of the prophet, somewhere about two hundred years after his day.

That the book of Jonah is not literal history, though it contains history, ought to be self-evident. As for Nineveh and Jonah’s preaching there—there is no reason to question this as a part of the genuine history contained in the book, but that it can be taken in its entirety as pure history is unthinkable. It is largely a *symbolical narrative*, a great parable meant to teach a great truth—and there is no better way to teach religious truth than by parable. Our Lord has demonstrated that.

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<sup>1</sup> J. E. McFayden, *The Use of the Old Testament*, p. 246.

But this is not the place to go into a critical discussion of this book, which is not to the purpose now. Suffice it to say that whether this book be regarded as history or parable or both, its truth and purpose are the same. In either case it is the greatest missionary document of the Old Testament.

Yes, surely, this is a most beautiful book; but Jonah, its hero, is a very contemptible person—disobedient, stubborn, given to fits of temper, sulky, and narrow-minded beyond most men. It is plain that Jonah, the prophet, did not write the book named for him. He could not have written it, since in it he is pictured to be a narrow-minded, small-hearted, mean-spirited man—and he would hardly have set himself forth in such light—while the book itself is the most generous, catholic, and sublime in the Old Testament. As to its teaching and spirit, then, it may truly be characterized as one of the “grandest that ever was written.”

Let us now examine the character of the man as drawn for us by the book.

Jonah, a prophet of Israel, is called to go to Nineveh as a foreign missionary to preach to a benighted people the gospel of God. But Nineveh was the chief city and capital of Assyria, and Assyria was the most ruthless nation of the ancient eastern world, the foremost and bitterest enemy that Israel ever had. This was the nation

that finally destroyed the Northern Kingdom of the Jews. This cruel people had dealt unmercifully with Israel. For two hundred years their brutal and bloodthirsty kings had ground her under their iron heels. And now must Israel's prophet go to Israel's relentless and hated foe with the message of forgiveness and love? Not Jonah—not if he could avoid it. That was too much to ask of him. The "little Israelite" simply refused to go. He sought to put the world between him and the scene of his call.

He was called to Assyria in the far East, but he hastened toward Spain in the far West. Ordered to go east, he started to go west—and he purposed to go as far west as he could get. He went to the nearest harbor and hunted out the ship destined for the farthest port, the ship which would take him the farthest away from Assyria and Nineveh—a ship which was bound for Tarshish in Europe. With eagerness and haste he boarded the ship, paid the fare gladly, went down into her lowest compartment, heaved a sign of relief, and was soon fast asleep. Now for a peaceful slipping away from the irksome task. Jonah's conscience was also asleep. He thought that he would soon be far away from God, and far away from Nineveh, and far away from the repugnant duty. But he was much mistaken; a great storm arose which upset all his plans. And here one is reminded that no good ever comes of disobeying God or



running away from duty. "When one sets out to baffle God there is bound to be a storm." It is folly to think that we may fly in the face of known obligation or plain duty and that peace will ensue or that the sense of obligation will fade. God's peace is had by those who do God's will.

Notice that Jonah by his sin—for it was a sin—did not only imperil his own life, but the lives of many others; he came near causing the death of a whole boat full of innocent men, which is a good suggestion, one commentator thinks, of the rather sobering fact that "we are all in the same boat." How true it is that one man's folly may bring disaster upon many! No man of us lives or dies unto himself. And no man of us sins unto himself. Every time we sin, we not only sin against God and ourselves, but we sin against others. Myriads among us are suffering from sins not our own. We suffer from the sins and neglect of others, and we have the right to ask, as those men in Jonah's unfortunate boat asked, "for whose cause is this evil upon us?" and if the answer could be given, in most cases, it would probably be, "parents, teachers, friends, companions, who have wrongly influenced, misled or neglected us in the formative years." It is true that we ourselves are the masters of our fate, and yet it is just as true that our fate is sealed for us by others.

The boatmen learned that Jonah was a Hebrew, and that he was seeking to evade a commission

from God. He told them that he feared the Lord, "the God of heaven, which made the sea and the dry land." He confessed that he was the cause of their distress, and said if they would cast him overboard their trouble would end. This they did and found it to be as he had said.

Now after much suffering and honest confession Jonah was restored to dry land and went, though most reluctantly, to preach to the sinful people of Nineveh. Jonah was "the first apostle to the Gentiles," but what an unwilling apostle he was! Rather than one sent, he was one compelled; he had to be forced to go. How different from that great apostle to the Gentiles of a later day, who, impelled by a great love, went in the face of much adversity, to tell men of the love of God! He went, how gladly! But Jonah went reluctantly indeed.

In this Jonah correctly epitomized his nation. Israel had been appointed God's missionary to the nations, but she had evaded the obligation. She was most remiss in assuming any responsibility whatever for the peoples beyond her borders; and when at length she did so, it was only after much suffering on her part and much long-suffering on the part of God. Not until she had been swallowed up in the Babylonian Exile did she in any sense become a missionary to the nations. Not until the Babylonian monster (as Jeremiah called Nebuchadnezzar) had swallowed up Israel

like a dragon, did she broaden sufficiently to admit "foreigners" into her missionary program—and to only a small extent even then.

Jonah finally went and preached to the detested Assyrians, but you can be sure of one thing—there was no love in his message. He promised them no mercy or forgiveness, but judgment aplenty. He went through Nineveh's long winding streets grimly announcing their impending doom, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

God wanted to save the pagan Ninevites; wanted to lift them out of their brutality and ignorance, but this bigoted prophet did not want them spared. He wanted these foes of his country destroyed. If Nineveh was spared—even though she repented of her sins and embraced Israel's God—yet for what she had done to his country and might still do if spared, the prophet wanted her punished with extinction. Revenge was sweet to Jonah. He preached with a vaunting vengeance that old austere doctrine, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." His religion was one of unbending law altogether devoid of love. He represented to them only a small part of the truth of God and steered clear altogether of His love and mercy.

What a noble figure Jonah would have made standing in the crowded streets of sinful Nineveh proclaiming to these bitterest enemies of the Jews

the wonderful love of God! He would have been remembered to the end of time as one who had done an altogether unearthly thing, instead of being remembered as the most bigoted spokesman of a loveless patriotism and a heartless religion.

Jonah permits us to see what a difficult task God has always had to get his love and truth through the minds of men to the world. If the mind of the preacher is prejudiced and narrow, if his heart is unwarmed by the Father's love, his message, like that of Jonah's to Nineveh, is sure to be a loveless one; and it will reveal but a small part of the divine truth. Jonah did not want to see these enemies of Israel converted; he preferred to see them destroyed. It was a shame, he thought, for God to show any mercy to such savage heathen.

But the preaching of the prophet had surprising effects. So fiercely did he proclaim their imminent and inevitable doom that the whole city was profoundly stirred. The people repented and humbled themselves, from the greatest to the least of them, before the God whom Jonah said was soon to fall upon them in exterminating judgment. But their repentance was little to Jonah's liking. This is one time when a preacher preferred to have no success. Now that the people had repented, he was afraid that God would spare them. Jonah knew Jehovah to be a God of love. He knew how absurdly patient and kind

He is. He knew it to be God's nature—a kind of weakness in Him Jonah thought—to show mercy and forgive. He knew that God would be strongly tempted to save the Ninevites now that they were in tears of repentance.

And sure enough, it turned out as Jonah had feared, "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not."

God cannot witness the smallest sign of true repentance in the most hopelessly sinful without rushing in mercy to forgive, for He is a God, as Jonah grudgingly admitted, "plenteous in mercy and full of compassion." But Jonah went outside the city and sat down on a hill where he could see all that happened to the place and waited, thinking and hoping that after all God might destroy it.

This is one of the most awful pictures in the Bible. Just imagine a prophet of the Lord sitting on a hill longing to see God send down fire to burn up a great city—men, women, children, animals, and all!

Why did he wish such a thing to be?

If Nineveh was not destroyed, his preaching of course would be discredited, and his reputation as a prophet would be gone. But it was not this which so vexed his soul. Jonah was vexed to think that God refused to punish the dreaded



foes of Israel. God, he felt, was missing a fine opportunity to make quick work of these heartless oppressors of His people. Would it not be a false and dangerous pity to spare ruthless Nineveh? He was animated by a callous and cold patriotism. His vanity, it may be, was wounded, but it was more than wounded vanity that he felt. He suffered from a yet darker disease: it was his Simon-pure hatred of an enemy people, his lack of love for misguided and menacing "foreigners" that prompted his monstrous desire.

On the top of the hill there he sits under his booth, waiting and watching to see if God is going to destroy Nineveh. It is plain that He is not. Then he whines, whimpers, and frets; he grows sulky and quarrels with God; he complains, "Was not this my saying, when I was in my country? Therefore I hastened to flee to Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repentest thee of the evil." As much as to say, "I fancied if I came and preached to these Ninevites and they repented, you would forgive and save them." Then like Elijah under different circumstances, he prays to die, thinking he would rather die than to live any longer in a world governed by such a God—a God who loved brutal Assyrians as much as choice Israelites.

And now God gently reasons with the agitated

prophet. He deals with him tenderly, but frankly. He had caused a gourd to spring up and shelter him from the burning sun. This gave the prophet comfort and greatly pleased him. It helped to allay his anger and calm his agitated soul. But during the night a worm bit off the gourd, and very suddenly Jonah's nice shade was spoiled. The hot east wind blew upon the prophet and the tropical sun beat upon his head and he fainted. In self-pity he cried:

My lovely gourd is withered in an hour!

I droop, I faint beneath the scorching sun.

He was much displeased and again desired to die. He scolded God for allowing the grateful shade to be spoiled. Then in a kindly, but bantering manner the Lord said to Jonah, "Art thou very angry about the gourd?" Jonah quickly retorted that he was, and that he had a right to be.

Now the first time he got angry, it was because Nineveh *was spared*, but now he is angry because his gourd *is not spared*. The prospect of a whole city being destroyed had moved him not at all, but he was greatly perturbed when a gourd which offered him an afternoon's pleasure was smitten. And the Lord said, "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: *and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern*

*between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"*

Could anything be more beautiful than this vision of God's love which reaches out to cruel Nineveh and down even to the animals which served them? And that love for the little children!—there is nothing like this in all the Bible until the Son of Man came and said, "Suffer the little children, to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jonah had felt no pity for Nineveh, not even for the thousands of innocent children thronging her streets, but for himself he had strong pity.

A writer in *Peake's Commentary* says, "Jonah was one of those in whom humanity has been almost killed out by religion." But it was a sorry kind of religion, for "pure religion and undefiled before God" makes one charitable and humane, but Jonah was inhuman. He could endure the destruction of a great enemy city, nay, passionately long for it, but he would not for a moment willingly forego his own personal comfort.

Assyria *was* cruel, savage, brutal; she *had* harassed Israel without mercy; but here was a city with more than a half million, one hundred twenty thousand of whom were innocent children, too young as yet to know the difference between their right hand and their left hand—"and also much cattle." What if the kings of Nineveh had been cruel to Israel? Surely the little children

had had nothing to do with it; they at any rate were innocent of the crimes of their country against humanity.

God would have Jonah and all others who do not love "foreigners" to know that He cares for all men alike, and that He especially pities the multitudes who are sunk in ignorance and sin without the knowledge of God. He would have all know Him, from the least to the greatest. This, Jonah and the nation which he correctly mirrors was so slow to learn.

This little book would teach us many fine lessons. It has been called the most Christlike portion of the Old Testament. It not only shows us the folly of resisting the will of God, and the futility of trying to have spiritual peace apart from doing one's duty, but it gives us an early look-in upon the love of God for the world of men which later beamed out in perfect splendor in the Son of Man. It registers a loud protest against religious bigotry and intolerance. It strikes at the contemptuous attitude of the Jews to other races, and especially does it seek to shame them for their attitude toward their enemies. In the person of this loveless and vindictive prophet the Jewish Church is held up to scorn. This book would have Israel and all men know that God's love is all-embracing, and that His mercy extends to the vilest of humanity. If Israel has been chosen from among the nations,

it is not because God loves her more than others; if she is an elect people, she has been chosen to serve the less fortunate of mankind. It is true that Nineveh lies out in the dark world beyond Israel's covenant, but she does not lie outside the loving purpose of Israel's God. His all-inclusive love reaches out beyond the Jews, and includes the distant peoples, even the hated Assyrians, yes, even down to the dumb animals which serve mankind. In a word, the one thing that this little book so eloquently proclaims is, *God so loves the world!*

What a rebuke it is to this prophet who never once prayed for this guilty people, but panted only for their destruction! And what a rebuke it is to the God-enlightened Jewish nation's attitude to her missionary opportunity and obligation! It teaches us that even those enslaved by superstition's sway have the capacity to love God and rise to better things. It makes the responsibility of the prophet and the nation quite clear—mercy awaits the Ninevites, if they turn to God. But how shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they turn lest someone turn them. How shall they love God if they know Him not? Jonah or someone must go to enlighten them.

Our world is darkened today by many a Nineveh, because the Christian Church has too often taken the attitude of Jonah. China might have



been Christian today if the Church had done her duty yesterday. Back in the Middle Ages the emperor Kublai Khan asked the head of the Church of Europe to send one hundred Christian missionaries to China to instruct his people. But the Church did not love "foreigners" then. She was at that time busy with foreign wars, seeking to put the states of Europe under her control, and nothing was done about the "call" from China. Years went by; the request came again, and finally *two* missionaries were sent!

Phillips Brooks once said the Church in her attitude to missions reminded him of a ship of which he had heard. A ship, he said, was loaded with provisions and sent to a starving nation, but instead of taking the food to the starving people, the ship's crew sailed off on a pleasure trip upon the ocean, consuming themselves the food with which they were sent to alleviate the suffering of their fellows. This is a caustic criticism to make of the Church, but it must be admitted that she has done just that a good share of her history.

God had commissioned Israel to carry His message of love to the world, but Israel, like Jonah, had neglected or refused to do so. But a people who would not be missionary could not please God. And the Church today which is not missionary in spirit is not so much a Church of Christ, as a "synagogue of Satan."

Jonah would not be a foreign missionary, because he did not love foreign peoples, least of all those who were his enemies. Even today there are branches of the Christian Church which have no missionary spirit. The Greek Church, we are told, because she has suffered so much at the hands of Mohammedans, refuses to send any missionaries to convert them to Christ. And the Oriental Churches of Turkey make no effort to Christianize the hated Turks; with them for twelve hundred years it has been a capital crime to try to convert a Mohammedan! And this is two thousand years after the "King of Love" bade His Church "go into *all* the world" with His message of love!

There was some ground of excuse for Israel, perhaps, for Christ had not come, and law more than love was in force in the world; but how shall Christians be excused for their apathy now? The Jews of that far-off day may be pardoned for hating their cruel oppressors, but how shall the followers of Christ be excused for disdaining even their enemies?

This beautiful book was meant to shame them and us out of all such littleness. It was much ahead of its age, and its truth will be timely so long as men are men.

Every true Christian must have in his heart a place for all mankind. Race and color and creed can make no difference. Jonah's religion was

one of narrow nationalism. There is a great deal of Jonah-religion in America and the West today. Indeed the only religion—if such it may be called—that many possess nowadays is of this Jonah type. Religious bigotry abounds; class intolerance is rife, and the loveless clash of creed and class and color is everywhere to be heard. What is all this but the ugly old Jonah-spirit persisting among us? Class is arrayed against class; clan against clan; color against color; West against East and East against West, and the sickening strife goes on. Jonah thought Israel had a monopoly on God. And today there are some whose skins are white who think and act as if they were the elect of God, while men whose skins are yellow or black are not so esteemed of heaven.

This unbrotherly attitude has been effectively satirized by a modern colored poet who rightly deplores class cleavage. Speaking of our proud white race he says:

She even thinks that up in heaven  
Her class lies late and snores,  
While poor black cherubs rise at seven  
To do celestial chores.<sup>1</sup>

How the modern world and the Church needs to hear again the message of Jehovah to Jonah! May God help us to learn that for all these Ninevehs of our hatred and gross neglect, the Great Father has nothing but pity and love!

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<sup>1</sup>Countie Cullen.

"Oh, East is East and West is West,  
And never the twain shall meet."  
So spake a son of man—and erred!

"Oh, man is man, and man with man shall meet,"  
So taught the Son of Man, and at his feet,  
Bade us there learn the worth of *human* worth;  
To see the man apart from race and birth.

To find an Aryan pale and Aryan brown,  
In Mongrel and in sun-blackd African,  
The oneness of humanity—the same  
God-touched, aspiring, worthful soul of man.

Boast not, O Aryan pale o'er Aryan brown,  
Of greatness not in thee—'tis in the gift!  
For, once a nail-pierced Hand of Asia touched  
Thy life and grants thee now his gracious life.

Beware, lest in the roll of judging years,  
That Hand, withdrawn from thee through pride of race,  
May touch to power those races now despised,  
And grant to them thy forfeit—power and place.

The Master bids thee loose thy petty self  
In service, and thy help to brothers give;  
And thou shalt truly find thyself again,  
'Twill be thy gain, and others too shall live.

Thus freed from tribal mind and attitude,  
Thy Christianed soul, with self renounced shall find  
A larger, richer self of brotherhood;  
Since, with the Christ, it has the Kingdom mind.

A Kingdom where there is no East nor West;  
There are no walls dividing clan from clan;  
But brotherhood as wide as humankind,  
And with a king who is the "Son of Man."

"Oh, man is man, and man with man shall meet,"  
So speaks the Son of Man. O Master! shamed,  
But learning, sit we here—here at thy feet.

## CHAPTER XII

### ELIJAH: THE MAN OF FAITH AND GLOOM

Elijah was a man of like nature with us.—James 5:17. R. V.

Elijah was the first of the prophets. Others before him had been regarded as prophets, but in no sense were they pure prophets. Samuel was called a prophet, but he was more priest and judge than prophet. Moses was called a prophet, but he was more lawgiver and statesman than prophet. Elijah was *all* prophet, and the first of these unique spirits to appear in Israel or the world. Elijah, then, had no predecessor, he patterned after no one. He was a spiritual trail blazer borne on by a mighty passion of religious conviction. And he had no genuine successor. There never was another Elijah, and never will be. John the Baptist faintly resembled him. Jesus said that John was the spiritual adumbration of the mighty Elijah. And Christ Himself in His day reminded some of the vigorous Tishbite, "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, Some say John the Baptist: but some say Elijah."



Elijah burst upon the world as suddenly and dramatically as he left it. He was an apparition. He appears startlingly quick, makes a bold, blunt, burning speech, and as suddenly disappears. He is the impersonation of grandeur, of mystery, and of judgment.

We know nothing of Elijah until he burst, volcano-like upon Israel in King Ahab's evil day. He is one of the most solitary figures of human history. So far as we are concerned, he had no father or mother, brother or sister; he seems to have had no wife, and almost no friend except God—God was his bosom Friend, and he was the intrepid friend of God. His very name means, "Jehovah is my God." His name carries in it a stern challenge to his Baal-worshipping king and people. "Elijah"—whenever that name is pronounced, it is saying with the most passionate fervor and gallant courage, "Jehovah is God." And in view of the widespread devotion to the Tyrian Baal then prevalent in Israel, the name is loaded with deep sarcasm; as much as to say, "God is God, Baal is no god." To this whole-souled prophet Jehovah alone is God. He will tolerate no other, he is the sworn foe of polytheistic idolatry and religious compromise.

Elijah sprang from the rocky hills and dales beyond the Jordan. In him were the rugged virtues of the highlands. He was full of the stout courage and simple faith of the people among

whom he lived. Elijah was courage incarnate, heroism sublime and supreme. His heroic stand against the idol worshipers on Mount Carmel is "a monument on the path of human progress." He is an Old Testament Luther battling against tremendous odds, and undismayed, single-handed and alone, turns back a nation to spiritual worship. Like Luther at Worms he said, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me." We may say of this clear-visioned, stalwart reformer:

The world redeemed from superstition's sway  
Is breathing freer for thy sake today.

In his first public appearance, he had tramped full forty miles from his mountain home in Gilead to the ivory palace of Ahab the king to threaten him, to take up against the throne the cause of an oppressed people and an outraged God.

As the text says, "He was a man of like nature (or passions) with us." "Elijah had a heavenly name, but he had, to begin with, but an earthly nature. Elijah was a man, to begin with, subject to like passions as we are. Elijah was a man, indeed, of passions all compact. We never see Elijah that he is not subject to some passion or other. A passion of scorn and contempt; a passion of anger and revenge; a passion of sadness and dejection and despair; a passion of preaching; a passion of prayer. Elijah was a great man. There was a great mass of manhood in Elijah.

He was a Mount-Sinai of a man, with a heart like a thunderstorm.”<sup>1</sup> Elijah has been called the prophet of fire. He was a red-hot sort of man. He lived in a time when fiery methods had to be used. He was “no soft-spoken, mild-mannered apostle discoursing on ‘sweetness and light’.” Such would have had no effect upon his rude, hard age. Drastic measures had to be taken. Dr. Whyte continues, “All the difference between Elijah and Ahab was in the subjection of their passions. Elijah was a man of immensely stronger passions than poor Ahab ever was; only Elijah’s powerful passions all swept him up to heaven, whereas all Ahab’s contemptible passions shouldered and shoveled and sucked him down to hell.”<sup>2</sup> W. M. Taylor says, “The courage of Luther, the plainness of speech of Latimer, the devoutness of Calvin, and the fervid impetuosity of Knox were all united in the character of this one man of God.”<sup>3</sup>

No man fills a larger place in the religious tradition and spiritual imagination of Israel than Elijah, and rightly so; it was he who kept Hebrew religion alive in one of the darkest hours of its history. In his day the second greatest struggle of Israel’s religious existence was on them. The first had come with their enslavement in Egypt, where they had been brutalized, and all but

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, Vol. 3, p. 94. Used by permission, F. H. Revell Co., New York.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> *Elijah the Prophet*.

paganized. In Egypt the faith of Abraham had been well nigh crushed out of Abraham's race. And now again the religion of Abraham, Moses, and David is seriously imperiled by a foul, stupid cult spreading as a flood over the land. The book of Ecclesiasticus, speaking of this time in Israel, says, "Then stood up Elias the prophet as fire, and his word burned like a lamp." No prophet is so often mentioned in the New Testament as Elijah. It is said, "Among the Jews to this day he is expected at every Passover, and a vacant seat is kept for him."

Let us photograph the times in which this imperial prophet "stood up." In our world of cause and effect, everything has its reason. What was it that called Elijah forth? What was it that he flung himself against?

We have already seen in part. But if this question could be answered in a word, that word would be "Baal." Baal was the god of the people of Tyre. He was supposed to be the god of rain, fertility, and reproduction. He was a deity associated with agriculture, and since the Jews had now come to be an agricultural people, they came to place this Baal of their pagan neighbors on a level with Jehovah their God. In Ahab's day, it was hard telling which was the god of Israel—Melcart, the Baal of Tyre, or Jehovah, the God of Abraham. This foulest of the heathen gods was having well nigh undisputed sway in

Jehovah's land. Ahab's marriage to Jezebel of Tyre had made Baal all but supreme. In theory the Hebrews held to the worship of Jehovah, but in practice they bowed to Baal. To please his pious and dominating queen, the king built a temple to Baal in Samaria, though he himself still professed to worship Jehovah. Both king and people were running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. Baal, who was considered to be the god of generation and reproduction, caused Israel's swift descent into the vilest of impure living. Immorality and lust, as is practiced today by certain putrid cults in the heathen temples of India, came to have the sanction of religion. Hebrew religion was fast losing its purity, and was in danger of becoming altogether extinct.

But God had prepared a man for the "whirlwind hour." A prophet had arisen to deal a deathblow to Baal. To Elijah, religion was everything. He faced the wicked king and the corrupt prophets and demanded a contest to prove which was God, Jehovah or Baal. He had already predicted that there would be no rain for several years, and the drought had come, in spite of the belief that Baal was the god of rain and fruitfulness. Baal, the giver of rain, and no rain for years! Surely this was the psychological hour for Elijah to strike. Now was the time to force the contest. Now was the time to convince the people and gain their support in uprooting the



obnoxious scourge from the land. So the prophet went to the people with the matter, saying, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." The people were wobbling. They went limping. They were what we would call today, "lame Christians," and Elijah, who stood stanchly on the side of God, said to these mild-mannered, half-hearted believers, "How long go ye limping between the two sides?" They were so sunken in moral apathy that they "answered him not a word." They were afraid to say where they stood. The fact is they wanted to serve both God and Baal. The apostle James, who seems to have greatly admired Elijah, would say of all such that they were double-minded, and unstable in all their ways. Our own age is not without its devotees of the double way. But you cannot be on two opposite sides at the same time. The Bible has no patience with religious compromise. Jesus strongly affirmed, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The true servants of God are patrons of the one Way. "I would thou wert cold or hot," said the glorified Christ to His languishing Church, "so then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."

A contest is to be staged on Mount Carmel, and the god that answers by fire is to be acknowledged God. Great preparation is made. Then

the prophets of Baal begin their appeal. All day long in the blazing Syrian sun they cry in frenzy to their god. They gash themselves till the blood spurts, but nothing happens, no fire falls. At last Elijah can no longer contain himself; in merciless sarcasm he mocks them, "Cry aloud," he says, "for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or perhaps he is asleep, and must be awaked." Then Elijah comes forth in regal masterfulness and solitary grandeur and prepares to offer to Jehovah. Is there not deep sarcasm also in his use of much water? Remember that Baal is the god of rain, but Jehovah, the God of fire, will destroy the god of water. Elijah prays, the fire falls, and the people shout, "Jehovah"—not the Baal—"He is God; Jehovah, He is God." Baal was shamefully defeated, then the rain came, and the people knew that it was from God, not Baal. Invincible Elijah! Was there ever a greater hero? "Elijah a man of like passions with us." Can this be so? Surely James is mistaken. This man who made kings tremble? This man who puts his finger in Ahab's face and makes that face grow white? This man who "carried heaven's key in his pocket for three years and six months"? This man, who when the earth was parched, prayed and it was drenched? This man who lifted the dead boy to life, who defeated eight hundred fifty pagan prophets, who had such mighty power with

God and over men? This man who did not even die, as other men, but sailed home in God's fiery chariot, "a man of like nature with us"? "No," we say, "Elijah was not like us!"

But there is another side to Elijah—a weak side. We have been looking at him in his strength. We come now to look at him in his weakness; for this man of sterling faith became the man of gloom and despair.

When the news of the overthrow of the Baal-prophets reached Jezebel, who has been aptly called "the Lady Macbeth of Hebrew story," she was furious and sent word to the prophet saying, "As surely as thou art Elijah and I am Jezebel, so let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them"—one of the dead prophets of Baal—"by tomorrow about this time." Elijah was a man of vivid imagination. He fancied himself being hewed to pieces by the enraged queen. He knew too well the rage and determination of this vindictive woman. He was afraid, and rose, and went for his life. Might not the hand that had so effectively done away with poor Naboth, make away with him also? At any rate he took to his heels and did not stop until he reached Beer-sheba, the farthest town in South Judah, about one hundred miles from Carmel. He dropped down under a juniper bush, a weary, dispirited man, and requested for himself that he might die.

See him as he sits there under this broom tree of the desert, his head between his knees, dejected and blue! We have little trouble *now* in believing James when he says, "Elijah was a man of like nature with us." We see it to be so. On Carmel he had stood far above and apart from us, but under the juniper tree he comes close to our nature. He is down where we live now. He had been the prophet of whirlwind and storm; he is now the man of despair. He had been the giant of faith, sustained by the sense of doing a great work; he is now the man of gloom, fretting himself sick because he thinks he has failed.

What was the matter with Elijah? Why this swift descent from the mountain peak of unparalleled courage into the valley of cowardice and fear? How may we account for the prophet's sudden collapse of faith?

In the first place, *he was tired*. He was utterly spent. His recent days had been full of intense excitement. He had just passed through a most trying ordeal in which much physical energy and spiritual emotion had been expended. He had wrought manfully. For days he had moved in a storm of emotion. Great emotion burns one's nerves up quickly. Then the victory came on Carmel, and in the exhilaration of it all he had run before the chariot of Ahab all the way to Jezreel, a distance of seventeen miles! All aglow with the sense of achievement he had done, so

to speak, the impossible. The day for which he had lived and so heroically toiled seemed dawning. On the banks of the Kishon Baal's prophets were slain; the detested cult was unhorsed; idolatry seemed dethroned; all the people had shouted, "Jehovah, He is God." Then in answer to his prayer, the rain had come; everything looked like victory. But alas! it proved not to be.

In the next place, *he was disappointed*. When he got to Jezreel he got the disconcerting message from Jezebel threatening his life. He had expected that the people, who had shouted but yesterday, "Jehovah, He is God," would stand by him today, but they did not. They were like the spineless people of Christ's time, who wanted to make Him king one day when they saw the miracle of the loaves and were filled; they shouted, "Hosanna!" upon his entrance into Jerusalem, and but a day or so later, cried with the rabble, "Crucify him, crucify him." To the prophet it had looked like the most decisive triumph. He never dreamed that any would dare lift a voice in defense of the old defeated heathenism again, but here is Jezebel as bold and as menacing as ever. If there could be as much danger in the bite as in the bark of this venomous cur—and Elijah could not doubt it—then it would be bad.

Elijah is suffering the fate of all reformers. He is amazed at the virility and persistence of sin, and can but wonder at its determined come-



back. He is disappointed at the unsteadiness of the people. He has not learned that deep-rooted evils are not to be uprooted in a day; that gigantic wrong cannot be abolished by a single blow. Yes, Elijah is sorely disappointed with the results of his reforms. He feels a lack of sympathy, "I, even I only, am left." He has relapsed. The dull, haunting thought of effort in vain has seized him. The reaction is complete, "O Lord, take away my life, it is no good my living any longer." Like Pilgrim in Bunyan's great allegory, he had slept in the Palace Beautiful at the top of the Hill Difficulty only to go down into the Valley of the Shadow the next morning. You remember Pilgrim, who after much toil, came to the top of the Hill Difficulty and slept in the Palace Beautiful, built by the Lord of the Hill for weary pilgrims. He slept the sleep of peace. In the morning he was taken to the roof where he could look Zionward and see the Delectable Mountains. But immediately on resuming his journey he went down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. After being up there you would have thought he never could have taken such a come-down; but he did. It was so with Elijah.

But Elijah was magnifying his troubles as a man with the "blues" will. God told the worn prophet that he was fretting needlessly, that He still had a people who had not bowed to Baal. However, God did not then, and *does not now*,

excuse the seven thousand for their cowardly silence. Why did they not speak their mind? Why did they not rally to their brave champion? They ought to have taken a definite stand. Elijah had seen the right and the wrong clearly distinguished, and the issue plainly drawn. He could not comprehend how the people could be lukewarm and refuse to make a choice. They would not be kindled either to love or hatred. They were limping between the two sides. Nothing is quite so exasperating to a prophetic soul as this. It is sickening. Nothing is so inexcusable in God's people as lack of enthusiasm. Religion is enthusiasm or it is nothing. Jesus could overlook many faults in those who would be His disciples, but He could not excuse a lack of enthusiasm—to Him that was unpardonable. It was so with our prophet. Why do not folks line up, and stay lined up, on one side or the other? We sympathize with Elijah.

But "What doest thou here, Elijah? Up! Under the shade of the juniper tree is no place for a prophet of the Lord! Up! and to the work that I bid thee!"

Perhaps our God may of our conscience ask,

"What doest thou here, frail wanderer from thy task?  
Where hast thou left those few sheep in the wild?"

Then should we plead our heart's consuming pain,  
At sight of ruin'd altars, prophets slain,  
And God's own ark with blood of souls defil'd;

. . . . .

Back then, complainer; loathe thy life no more,  
Nor deem thyself upon a desert shore,

Because the rocks the nearer prospect close.  
Yet in fallen Israel are there hearts and eyes  
That day by day in prayer like thine arise:

Thou know'st them not, but their Creator knows.

It was not as bad as Elijah had thought. When the stormy quakes which rent the rocks and hills before his eyes had passed, and when the impetuous storm within his own pugnacious soul had calmed he found himself trusting the ultimate purpose of God.

By the perilous peaks, by the cold black tops, I wandered  
and wept;

Into the holes of the rocks that is fringe of Thy mantle  
I crept;

There in the storm, Thy breath, and under the shadow,  
Thy face,

I was safe, I believed, I had faith in the ultimate Purpose  
and Grace.

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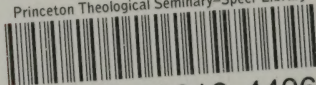




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